



People of the Book

An Analytical Study of Jews and Christians in the Qur'an
With Particular Reference to Contemporary Exegetical Discourse

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Declaration

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Submitted by Khalifa Ezzat Abuzeid Hassan, in accordance with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies.

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Abstract

This thesis will analyse the Qur'anic discourse regarding the People of the Book (*Ahl Al-Kitāb*). In the first two parts of the thesis, this will be investigated through the classical exegesis of Al-Ṭabarī. In the final and major part of the thesis, two contemporary exegeses will be examined: those of Ibn 'Āshūr, and Sha'rāwī. The study has two aims: to carry out an in-depth study of the texts of the Qur'an related to the People of the Book, and to demonstrate the exegetical discourse and interpretation of these texts in the selected exegeses. This will be achieved by analysing these texts, assessing their historical context and *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), and comparing the ways in which the said exegeses reflect the People of the Book.

The study seeks to answer the following question: To what extent do the classical and contemporary exegetes understand and contextualise the passages relating to the People of the Book? There are other subsidiary questions which are linked to the main question and to the theme of the thesis will be answered throughout the thesis. These questions are: Do these passages demonstrate the categorisation of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* into negative, positive, polemical aspects? How do the Muslim exegetes understand this categorisation in the Makkan and Madinan Qur'an? Can these passages, as interpreted by Muslim exegetes, be considered as evidence for a neutral attitude and tone towards other faiths? Do they demonstrate the possibility of achieving salvation for these groups of faiths?

This study endeavours to analyse the different ways in which the People of the Book are highlighted in the explicit and implicit discourses of the Qur'an, as well as the reasons for these differences. The study finds that the Qur'anic discourse employs positive language when dealing with the Sacred Books and messengers of the People of the Book, but that it alternates between positive and negative discourse when dealing with the People of the Book themselves—the followers of these Holy Books and messengers. It also finds that belief in One God and doing good deeds are the main gateways to achieving salvation in the classical and two contemporary exegeses. Through this discourse, we can discover how the Qur'an addresses the People of the Book, including Muslims.



Dedication

To my parents, may God have mercy on them

To my children, Yusuf, Sarah, and Maryam

To my wife

To my friends in Egypt and UK.

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Notes

Generally, Arabic words throughout the study have been italicised and transliterated except for a few, such as ‘Qur’an’ and the names of people and cities. For the translation of the Qur’anic passages, a contemporary translation of the meanings of the Qur’an by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem was used for the majority of the passages. For the passages of the Qur’an, the number of the *Sūrah* and the *āyah* was added.

The date of death for every scholar is included after their name. Some terms with the same meaning are often used interchangeably, such as *Tafsīr*, interpretation and exegeses; *Ahl Al-Kitāb* and People of the Book; Scripture and Book; and Children of Israel and *banī Isrā’īl*. Some acronyms have been used, such as ‘pbuh’ (peace be upon him), ‘AH’ (the Islamic calendar – After Hijra) and ‘CE’ (Common Era). The position of the definite article (الشمسية) ال has been transliterated as follows: النزول = al-Nuzūl; in the same way as the definite article (القمرية) ال, both with ‘al-’, ignoring the phonetic vocalisation in (الشمسية) ال, (i.e. not an-Nuzūl). In transliterating the Arabic words, the following system has been used:

Consonants

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|--------|---|----|---|
| ه | ن | م | ل | ك | ق | ف | غ | ع | ظ | ط | ض | ص | ش | س | ز | ر | ذ | د | خ | ح |
| H | N | M | L | k | q | f | gh | ‘ | ẓ | ṭ | ḍ | ṣ | sh | s | z | r | D h | d | kh | ḥ |

Vowels

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|---------|----------|--------|--------|
| ء = ‘ | ء = a | ا = ā | و = ū | ي = ī | ع = ‘ |
| Isra’īl (mid-word) | (At the beginning of a word) | Al-Rāzī | Al-Nuzūl | Tafsīr | ‘Abbās |

List of Abbreviations

CE: Common Era

b.: date of birth

d.: date of death

h. or AH: the year of Hijra, After Hijra

nd.: no date

np.: no place

MS: *Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah* (the electronic Comprehensive Library)

The notation (Q 2:23) indicates Qur’an, *Sūrah* 2, passage 23

Introduction

Since the advent of Islam, Qur'anic exegesis has developed through various phases. Variant exegetical schools and works have emerged over time as a result of this, and others are predicated to appear in the future.¹ Consequently, scholars have developed new types and methodologies in their approach to exegeses. A turning point saw a move away from traditional exegesis (that is to say, *naqlī* or *riwāyah*) to a more rational approach ('*aqlī* or *dirāyah*) throughout Muslim history. New movements such as the *Shī'a*, *Khawārij*, *Murji'ah*, *Qadariyyah* and *Ṣūfīs* emerged, as well as the four schools of jurisprudence (i.e. *Ḥanafī*, *Mālikī*, *Shāfi'ī*, *Ḥanbalī*), and new converts to Islam. The emergence of these groups and their respective approaches impacted the development of exegesis, leading to changes in political, ideological, and theological viewpoints.

Based on this notion, it can be deduced that all exegetes are influenced by their milieu to some degree, and interpret the Qur'an according to their particular school of thought. For instance, certain exegetes, such as Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), focused on traditions and the legal teachings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)—a *ma'thūr* approach. Others focused on the *Ṣūfī* way such as Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240 CE), or on Arabic language such as Al-Zajjāj (d. 310 AH), Al-Wāḥidī (d. 468 AH), and Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH). Others concentrated on philosophy and *Kalām*, such as Al-Rāzī (d. 1210 CE), while others on history and stories, such as Al-Tha'labī (d. 427 AH) and Al-Khāzin (d. 741 AH). There were also those who focused on jurisprudence and its schools, such as Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1172 CE) and Al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 980 CE).² This development of exegesis has had an impact on the interpretation of the passages related to the People of the Book in both classical and contemporary *Tafsīr*, and the ways in which the contemporary exegetes have developed and contextualised the interpretation of these passages in order to comply with the modern times in which Muslims and *Ahl Al-Kitāb* live together in Western and Eastern societies.

Tafsīr (exegesis) and *Ta'wīl* (interpretation) are two significant terms which refer to commentary and explanation of the Qur'an. *Tafsīr* has various literal meanings in

¹ Abdul-Raof, Hussein, *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis Genesis and Development*, (London: Routledge, 2010) pp. 84-85

² Ibid.

Arabic: to disintegrate, to break down into pieces, to uncover or unveil. According to Claude Gilliot (b. 1940 CE), the origin of the term *Tafsīr* may not be Arabic, rather it lies in Aramaic, Syriac, or Christian-Palestinian words *peshar* or *pashshar*. This verb is also found in the Jewish-Aramaic language.³ Andrew Rippin (b. 1950 CE) suggests that the term is historically related to the exegesis of the Qur'an, in addition to the commentaries of Greek scientific and philosophical works. In Rippin's analysis, he concludes that, during the scholarly events of Islam's first three centuries, consistent differentiation is apparent in the use of the terms *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl* within the discipline of *Tafsīr*.⁴ With regards to the Qur'an, the term *Tafsīr* appears only once (Q 25:33), and is used in its linguistic as opposed to terminological sense. However, Muslim scholars coined the term to exclusively signify exegesis of the Qur'an, within which various analytical tools are employed for interpretation: morphological, grammatical, semantic, theological, and historical.⁵

Muslim scholars have also debated the differences between the meaning of the terms *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl*, a term frequently used by Al-Ṭabarī in his *Tafsīr: Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āyil-Qur'ān*. Furthermore, Al-Zarkashī (d. 1392 CE) defines the term *Tafsīr* as the explanation of the various meanings of a Qur'anic passage. This includes clarification of the occasion of revelation, the historical references, the place or period of revelation (Makkah or Madinah), clear or unclear, abrogated or abrogating, general or specific. In this context, according to Al-Zarkashī, *Ta'wīl* denotes the subtle objective meaning that is deduced from a passage.⁶ In comparison, *Tafsīr* can be considered as the characteristic of the general explanation of a passage, with the aim of discovering exoteric meaning and application; while *Ta'wīl* is the science of interpreting the general as well as the specific and subtle meanings of the words. In addition, other commentators note that the difference between *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl* is that *Tafsīr* is concerned with the transmission of tradition (*riwāyah*), while *Ta'wīl* is concerned with

³ Abu Sulaymān, `Abdul Hamid, *Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Islamic Methodology and Thought*, (2'd ed. Herndon, Va.: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993) p. 29

⁴ Rippin, A, *Tafsīr.* *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, University of Exeter. http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/tafsir-SIM_7294

⁵ Abdul-Raof, Hussein, *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis Genesis and Development*, (London: Routledge, 2010) pp.85-86

⁶ Az-Zarkashī, Badr Al-Dīn, *Al-Burhan fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Ma'rifah, 1972) vol. 4, p. 128

the deeper comprehension (*dirāyah*) of the text's inner meaning.⁷ Sirry maintains that Qur'anic *Tafsīr* has been classified as the study of explicating the word of God in light of new circumstances as opposed to the the social realities in which it first emerged.⁸

For Muslims, exegesis is important and significant as it is considered as the corpus amongst religious sciences, because all other Islamic studies rely on the meaning and explanation of the Qur'anic text. This importance stems from the Muslim attitude towards the Qur'an, regarding exegesis as a matter of theory and practice. Exegesis is an ongoing practice and fundamental requirement in order to understand the relevance of the Qur'an in any time and situation. It is this very practice which brings the Qur'an into the hearts and everyday life of the Muslim community.⁹ Therefore, exegesis is required due to the variability in individual human intellectual ability; some may need assistance to understand the implied meaning. Due to its sophisticated nature, some passages of the Qur'an are based on specific assumptions that are not clear to the public, while other passages or words contain more than one meaning which can only be explained by specialist scholars.¹⁰

Exegesis is now categorised into two eras, classical and contemporary. There are also two main trends that any given exegesis generally follows: *bil-ma'thūr* and *bil-ra'y*. Exegesis *bil-ma'thūr* relies on *ḥadīths* and traditions, while exegesis *bil-ra'y* relies on the application of rational principles and philosophical thought. Consequently, exegesis became an independent science dealing with the Qur'an systematically, a passage at a time, and this became known as exegesis *musalsal*. The new development led to some disadvantage, that was readily pointed out by the scholars. The rise of sectarianism meant that each sect interpreted or approached the Qur'an in a way to support its views and positions. In addition, the traditional exegesis (*bil-ma'thūr*) has been criticised for including Judeo-Christian sources (*Isrā'īliyyāt*) to obtain greater insight and detail concerning the Jews and Christians. From Al-Rāzī to fairly recent times, the science of exegesis stagnated and struggled to produce original

⁷ Ibn Taymiyah, Taqayyud-Din, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, (Kuwait: Dar al-Qur'an, 1956) pp. 78-89

⁸ Sirry, Mun'im, *Scriptural Polemics, The Qur'an and Other Religions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 9

⁹ Ayoub, Mahmoud, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, (New York: State university of new York, 1994) pp. 23-24

¹⁰ Ayoub, Mahmoud, *Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'an and Sunnah*, (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012) p. 81

works. Any work on Qur'anic exegesis concentrated on transmission from other works to derive meaning, instead of direct interaction with the Qur'an's text.

After the period of stagnation, the modern era marked a renaissance of exegesis in the Arab world and a revival in approach in the late half of the nineteenth century. The popular trend of exegesis and its ability to circulate religious and social ideas coincided with literacy, press, and broadcasting media, as well as novel and short story writing and education—all based on the European model, instead of the traditional Islamic model.¹¹ Classical exegesis is still consulted by those with a working knowledge of Islam; however, contemporary exegesis came to the forefront since it spoke directly to literate Muslims. As an example, Muhammad 'Abdu, Rashīd Riḍā, Sayyid Quṭb, Sha'rāwī, Ibn 'Āshūr, and many others composed their exegeses to motivate the reader in sermon-like fashion, seeking urgent reforms. The themes were practical and they addressed the circumstances of daily life which the Muslim reader could relate to. This characteristic of contemporary exegesis is different to the classical sober tone of Al-Ṭabarī, Al-Qurṭubī, Al-Rāzī and Ibn Kathīr.¹²

Moreover, modern day politics impinge upon the exegesis of these People of the Book passages and has an impact on the interpretation of the Qur'anic texts. For example, Muhammad 'Abdu, Rashīd Riḍā, Sayyid Quṭb, Sha'rāwī, and Ibn 'Āshūr were influenced by the political position in their time; this made some of them avoid politics and others endeavour to link the Qur'an with the current situation. Similarly, the change in the environment and times and nature of multi-faith society where Muslims and People of the Book live together has a similar impact on the interpretations of these texts. It has also caused change in Muslim scholarly interpretations of the Qur'anic discourse about the relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims and the challenges faced to answer questions on important issues such as freedom of belief, dealings and transactions, and building places of worship for People of the Book ...etc. Furthermore, advancement of Western civilization in Muslim countries brought about a new wave of Islamic thought in Qur'anic exegesis in both content and interpretation. The content of Qur'anic exegesis emerged as a result of the prevailing social, cultural and political changes in Muslim countries that was brought about by the western impact. In the face of modern science, Muslim exegetes faced a new challenge which

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Zebiri, K. *'Mahmud Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism'* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1993) p. 132

was to bring the Qur'anic principles to respond to a new social and political order in the wake of Western dominance. Thus, Qur'anic guidance was interpreted to offer Muslims alternatives or ways to assimilate Western models with success, whilst remaining true to their faith. Of course, certain Western modes of the framework, especially concerning women and their rights were problematic in the Islamic context, particularly regarding women's legal status and inheritance. The Western framework advocated feminism and equal rights on one hand Islamic guidance focused on the responsibilities within those rights on the other. To respond to similar challenges, new methodologies were crafted in literal studies and communication theory, to offer practical solutions backed by theoretical justifications that were re-interpreted and replaced by traditional interpretation, in favour of those that were agreeable to the contemporary intellect. Nonetheless, maintaining the authority of the Qur'anic text, these approaches were the basis of an understanding that included the nature of Divine revelation and its practical application in the manifestation of action.¹³

Reflections on the People of the Book in contemporary exegeses vary from one contemporary exegete to another. Some contemporary exegetes like M. 'Abdu, Riḍā, Sha'rāwī, and Ibn 'Āshūr hold that the relationship with People of the Book is based on respect and harmony rather than conflict. They elaborated the aspects and reasons of the positive discourse by giving insights and explanation to the basic principles that all prophets and messengers came to convey and enumerated the main matters which the People of the Book share: belief in God, belief in the Last Day, and doing good deeds. These are the criteria for sincere belief in the sight of God, and they are mentioned in passages of the Qur'an (See Q 2:62, 5:69, 22:17). They view that reward from God and eternal salvation is based on belief and good deeds, not on belief only or deeds only, and not simply affiliation to a certain religion.¹⁴ God will judge people on the basis of merit rather than on the grounds of apparent religious affiliation. It is conceitful to think that a member of a specific religion or its followers will be saved from Hellfire purely due to labelling. They also clarified in their commentaries the aspects and reasons for the negative discourse and polemical issues with the People

¹³ Wielandt, Rotraud, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Consulted online on 07 January 2019 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00059>

¹⁴ MS: Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990) vol.1, p. 94, and vol.1 p. 278

of the Book such as, disobedience to God, distortion of the Scriptures, trinity, divinity of Jesus, and breaking the law of the Torah and Gospel.

Western writers who wrote on contemporary exegeses include: Adam Metz (d. 1917 CE) and Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921 CE). Goldziher studied the contemporary schools of Islamic exegeses and their approaches which emphasise on the modernity, renewal, and the universality of Islam. They maintain that Islam is compatible with all times and places and it does not oppose the modernity and civilisation of the developed countries, rather it agrees with them except in some issues.¹⁵

The central characteristics of contemporary exegesis and the approach Muslim scholars have taken to interpret the Qur'an have been influenced by their own social, cultural, and political contexts, which reveals an appreciation for the role the Qur'an has played in impacting the lives of Muslims.¹⁶ Prof. Wielandt (b. 1944 CE) states that in Arab regions, there appears to be a shift and development of approach in contemporary exegesis, especially in Egypt.¹⁷ Such approaches to the Qur'an have faced obstacles from different facets of the Muslim community. Naturally, there would be much effort exerted to popularise the reinterpretation of the Qur'an considering modern exegetical standards. The opposing view maintains that if the doors to interpretation are opened without standard guidelines, then there would be many interpretations and the Qur'an would no longer exist to guide people to their natural pre-ordainment—to worship the One True God. Instead, it will replace guidance for moral, social, and economic matters and render itself to an intellectual text book.¹⁸

However, this is not entirely founded on logic, because to consider the late nineteenth century Qur'anic exegesis as modern is to categorise it as a science of its own with its own unique features and a noticeable difference to classical exegesis. To arrive at the desired understanding of the content and to select the appropriate method of interpretation are specific features of nineteenth century Qur'anic exegesis. The purpose was to revisit Qur'anic exegesis in order to provide answers to questions which arose as a result of Western civilisation impacting the political, cultural, and

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 152

¹⁶ Wood, A. S. '*Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍa Modernist Defense of Islam*' (London: Oneworld, 2008) p. 9

¹⁷ Wielandt, Rotraud. 'Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/exegesis-of-the-qur-a-n-early-modern-and-contemporary-EQCOM_00059

¹⁸ Ibid.

social changes in the Muslim world. Fundamentally, the aim was to establish Qur'anic compatibility with modern science and to find an appropriate political and social order founded upon Qur'anic principles and values.¹⁹

'Aisha 'Abdulrahman (d.1419 AH/1998 CE) is an example of such a reformist exegete. By abandoning the methodology of the classical exegeses, she adopted a new methodology and approach in her exegesis that was named *Al-Tafsīr Al-Bayānī lil-Qur'ān Al-Karīm* (Rhetorical Exegesis of the Qur'an). She focused on the lexical issues and the original meanings of individual words found in fourteen short *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an.²⁰ Moreover, the end of the 20th century witnessed yet another approach to exegesis that analysed the main theme of a group of passages. This type of exegesis is called thematic exegesis, and it is present in Maḥmūd Shaltūt's *Tafsīr* (d. 1383 AH/1963 CE). Generally, the focus of thematic exegesis is to select and interpret a number of Qur'anic concepts that the author considers significant.²¹ Palestinian exegete Muhammad 'Izzah Drawaza (d. 1404 AH/1984 CE) was an exception. He interpreted on the basis of the chronological order of the *Sūrahs* or revelation.²² The Iraqī dentist Aḥmad Khayr Al-Umarī proposed a Qur'anic compass as a medium for developing new perspectives on the world and overthrowing outdated traditions, while the Muslim theologian Aysha A. Hidayatullah discusses feminist approaches to the Qur'an and their limitations.²³ Others interpreted only one *Sūrah*, or parts of the text (one *Juz'* or more), such as Muhammad 'Abdu in his *Tafsīr of Juz' 'Amma*. In a few cases, such commentaries dealt only with a selection or number of chapters chosen by the author to demonstrate the usefulness of a new exegetical method such as the aforementioned *Al-Tafsīr Al-Bayānī* by 'Aishah 'Abdur Raḥmān, and *Sūrah Al-Raḥmān* and *Suwar Qīṣār* by Shawqī Ḍayf (d. 2005 CE).²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 2

²⁰ Rippin, A. '*Tafsīr*, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, University of Exeter. 28 April 2016 <http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com/lib/exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/Tafsīr-SIM_7294>

²¹ Wielandt, Rotraud. 'Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/exegesis-of-the-qur-a-n-early-modern-and-contemporary-EQCOM_00059

²² *Al-Tafsīr al-Ḥadīth* consists of 12 volumes and published in Cairo 1962, arranged in chronological order of revelation of the *Sūrahs*. This is his major work. Darwaza outlined what he calls, "The exemplary method for understanding the Qur'an and its exegesis"

²³ Pink, Johanna, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today, Media, Genealogies and Interpretative Community*, (UK: Equinox, 2019), p. 5

²⁴ 'Abd al-Raḥmān, 'Aishah, *Maqāl fī l-Insān. Dirāsa Qur'aniyyah*, (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1969)

This resulted in modern Qur'anic exegesis displaying specific characteristics in their styles and trends. However, it is not an established school of its own; rather, it contains a trend with a unique feature. Most contemporary exegesis commentators provide their personal hypothetical opinions on unclear passages of the Qur'an, otherwise known as *Mutashābihāt*. A synoptic approach has been adopted by some contemporary Qur'anic exegetes, which provide brief details of the passages. Modern standard Arabic is used in commentaries that aim to provide ease for the reader. Contemporary exegetes such as Muhammad Al-Ghazālī, Sayyid Quṭb, Ibn 'Āshūr and M. M. Sha'rāwī have employed the literary tone and simple language to make the meanings of the Qur'an easier for the lay person to understand.²⁵

The content of contemporary exegeses does not rely greatly on traditional materials, such as *Hadīths* and *Athār* (traditions of companions and their followers), which are oft-repeated in classical exegesis.²⁶ In highlighting the break from the traditional approach to *Tafsīr*, Sirry outlines a fundamental argument concurred by modern exegetes. That is the earlier *Tafsīr* is concerned with concepts and terminologies, this approach has built a wall between the Qur'an and Muslims, preventing them access to the guidance and benefitting from it. Similarly, medieval scholars who adhered to this mode of approach towards the Qur'an, have done a disservice to the Muslim communities by coating the existing walls with thicker commentaries far removed from the objectives of the Qur'an and continuing the inaccuracies with minimal critical analysis of the earlier works.²⁷

Despite the sharp critical review of earlier *Tafsīr*, the modern reforms of Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī preferred to strike a balance between the latter's use of tradition with the current approach of reason. Some modern reformers preferred a balanced approach to the modes of modern *Tafsīr*, whereby they did not solely rely on tradition, but took from the classical *Tafsīr* that which they deemed befitting to the modern approach and endeavour to explicate the universal truth of the Qur'an to mankind.²⁸

²⁵ Abdul-Raof, H. '*Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*', (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2010), pp. 145-146

²⁶ Sirry, Mun'im, *Scriptural Polemics, The Qur'an and Other Religions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp. 24-25

²⁷ Ibid., 26-27

²⁸ Ibid., p. 27

Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī introduced interpretations and interesting explanation to the Qur'anic passages related to the People of the Book. In the shade of these passages, they demonstrated the reasons behind the fluctuating discourse about the Jews and Christians and referred to the historical contexts and linked them with the current situation in the modern world. Through this approach, they tried to add new explanation to the polemical passages, respond to the claims against Islam, and refute the accusations to its teachings, such as: Islam is an irrational religion; Islamic teachings are taken from the previous scriptures, modernity and civilization are a product of Christian civilisation; and the Islamic civilisation is a barrier to progress.²⁹ They focused on the Islamic utilisation of reason, the importance of science, and the avoidance of Judeo-Christian sources and superstitious practices and beliefs. What is worthy of noting is the illustration and presentation of their *Tafsīr* is significantly different to that of earlier works, which primarily serves the purpose of reformism and the aim to bring the interpretation of the Qur'an to the lives of lay Muslims and their communities and to revive the Islamic spirit of returning to the pure source of God's guidance. Many contemporary exegeses of the Qur'an follow the steps of the classical exegeses adding neither new methodologies and contemporary approaches or types of explanations.³⁰ However, these two exegetes tried to link Islam with contemporary life and modernity by introducing a new vision of modern exegesis.³¹

Thus, the exegeses of Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī represent a significant contribution to the Islamic scholarship of Qur'anic interpretation. They adopt a modern methodology in interpreting the Qur'an to reveal its compatibility with the modern age and current issues facing Muslims. A survey of studies relating to this topic in English revealed a scarcity regarding these two modern exegeses. This study aims to make a contribution to this field, as well as to the rich collection of academic research on Qur'anic exegesis and the way it portrays the types of discourse pertaining to the People of the Book. The choice of these three exegeses is attributed to their accessibility, commonality,

²⁹ Wood, A. S. '*Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍa Modernist Defence of Islam*' (London: Oneworld, 2008) pp. 30-31

³⁰ Wielandt, Rotraud, 'Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/exegesis-of-the-qur-a-n-early-modern-and-contemporary-EQCOM_00059

³¹ Wood, A. S. '*Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍa Modernist Defense of Islam*' (London: Oneworld, 2008) pp. 3-5

traditionality and modernity. They combine between classical and contemporary, as well as tradition and rationality.

In the Qur'an, narrative and stories of several prophets and messengers came with a clear message or a book to different nations and communities at different times and places to guide them the right way. It describes each one of them as a guide (Q 13:7) and warner (Q 35:24) for humanity. This succession of messengers and messages was sent to emphasise the same universal basic rules and principles that came from the same source (i.e. One God). Therefore, Muslims as part of their theology, must believe in previous messengers and messages. Despite religious communities becoming categorised and known by the scripture and prophet they follow; the Qur'anic stance is unique in that it regards itself as the speech of the One God who sent all previous books and messengers. Therefore, the religion of Islam is an all-encompassing one, including existing religions in establishing the continued and final guidance for human life. Moreover, one may notice this inclusive and comprehensive nature of the Qur'an in its passages regarding the term Islam which means submission. In the Qur'an three basic meanings have been given for this term. The first and broadest meaning of the term Islam is the submission of the whole of creation to the Creator (Q 3:83), and then the second meaning is the submission of mankind to the guidance of God as revealed through any of His prophets. In this regard, all messengers and their followers were Muslims because they all submitted to the will of God (Q 2:131). The third meaning is that Islam means submission of human beings to the guidance of God that came with the message of Prophet Muhammad (Q 5:3).³²

These stories of previous nations, people of other faiths, prophets and messengers from Adam to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon them, occupy a large portion of the Qur'an. The People of the Book similarly occupy a significant portion of the Qur'anic discourse. In *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* (The Cow: 2), the longest *Sūrah* in the Qur'an, the Qur'anic discourse about mankind after Adam's expulsion from paradise is addressed to the Children of Israel. The name of the *Sūrah* itself, *Al-Baqarah*, refers to the cow

³² Yaman, Hikmet. "The Criticism of the People of the Book (Ahl Al-Kitāb) in the Qur'ān: Essentialist or Contextual?" *Gregorianum*, vol. 92, no. 1, 2011, pp. 183–198. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23582566.

of the Children of Israel.³³ Similarly, in *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān* (The Family of ‘Imrān: 3), many passages address the story of Mary, mother of Jesus, her father ‘Imrān, and Jesus, the last prophet to the Children of Israel. According to Sha‘rāwī, *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* deals with the Children of Israel and the Jews and *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān* deals with Jesus and his family.³⁴ In *Sūrah Al-Mā‘idah* (The Table: 5), which is also one of the longest *Sūrahs* in the Qur’an, many of the events that took place between the Jews and Moses are described in detail. The *Sūrah* concludes with the debate between Jesus and the Children of Israel, who asked him to bring down a table with food from Heaven.³⁵ *Sūrah Al-Nisā’* (The Women: 4) also contains many significant passages about Moses (for example, (Q 4:153–159), while passages 171 and 172 towards the end of the *Sūrah* are narrations of Jesus.³⁶ *Sūrah Al-Isrā’* (The Night Journey: 17), which is also named *Banī Isrā’īl*, partly deals with the Children of Israel.³⁷ *Sūrah Al-Bayyinah* (The Clear Evidence: 98) is fully dedicated to the disbelievers among the People of the Book and polytheists (*Mushrikīn*) who were offered salvation when they were presented with evidences and signs (*Bayyinah*) of a true messenger.³⁸ These *Sūrahs* and other passages present a fluctuating discourse towards the People of the Book.

The Qur’anic discourse on the People of the Book in both classical and contemporary exegeses can be classified as positive, negative, and polemical. Positive references to the People of the Book are distributed throughout the Qur’an and refer to religious coexistence, thus the Qur’an displays a tolerant attitude (see Q 2:62, 3:113, 29:46).³⁹ The negative discourse however are also distributed throughout the Qur’an and demonstrates criticism and condemnation of the People of the Book. Such critical discourse is common in the Qur’an, but it is not restricted to the People of the Book

³³ Al-Baqarah (the Cow) has been named from the story of the Cow in this *Sūrah* (67-73). It has not, however, been used as a title to indicate the theme of the Surah. The *Sūrah* deals with a wide variety of other subjects.

³⁴ MS: Al-Sha‘rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur’an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), pp. 807-10

³⁵ This *Sūrah* takes its name from verse 112 in which the word *Mā‘idah* occurs. Like the names of many other *Sūrahs*, this name has no special relation to the subject of the *Sūrah* but has been used merely as a symbol to distinguish it from other *Sūrahs*.

³⁶ Böwering, Gerhard. ‘Chronology and the Qur’an. *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, Brill Online, 2012. (<http://www.brillonline.nl.lib.exeter.ac.uk>)

³⁷ Musallam, Mustafa, *Ma‘ālim Qur’aniyyah fī aṣ-Ṣirā’ ma’a al-Yahūd*, (Damascus: dar al-Qalam, 1999) p. 17

³⁸ Sharon, M. ‘People of the Book.’ *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, Brill Online, 2012, http://reference.works.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/people-of-the-book-SIM_00319

³⁹ Dammen McAuliffe, Jane, *Qur’anic Christians, An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p.4

alone; it also includes Muslims who disobey the commandments or break the Law of God. The third identifiable discourse in relation to the People of the Book is in the form of polemics and dialogue, a frequent feature throughout the Qur'an.⁴⁰ Polemical passages in the Makkan and Madinan passages of the Qur'an respectively display distinct styles and attitudes.

The Qur'anic discourse regarding the People of the Book can also be clearly classified into another three categories, each with its own perspective and angle. These are explicit, implicit, and polemical. Explicit discourse refers to explicit and direct mention of the People of the Book without mediation. Examples of this include *yā Ahl Al-Kitāb* (O People of the Book), *'utū Al-Kitāb* (those who have been given the Book), *Qālat Al-Yahūd* (the Jews said), *Al-Ladhīna Hādū* (those who follow Judaism), and *Naṣārā* (Christians). The second type of discourse is the implicit address to the Children of Israel (People of the Book) which emerges through the frequent mention of their prophets and messengers, through their Scriptures—the Gospel and the Torah, or their places of worship—synagogues and churches.

Generally, the Qur'an as mentioned before, alternates between praise and condemnation when dealing with the followers of said books and messengers. It employs positive language when dealing with the sacred Books and revered figures of the People of the Book.⁴¹ Analysing this discourse in these Qur'anic passages assists in determining in what way the Qur'an addresses the People of the Book (including Muslims) and helps in explaining the reflection of the Qur'anic discourse to the Jews and Christians in the three selected exegeses. This reflection can be generally described as balanced and context-independent as it criticises those who deserve criticism and praises those who are worthy of praise and invites them to follow their Books which they received.

The intellectual, social, and religious merits in discovering the references related to People of the Book in this exegetical discourse are many and various. For example, examining these Qur'anic references and passages relating to the People of the Book in the context required for contemporary historical analysis would aid to avoid the

⁴⁰ Sharon, M. 'People of the Book. *'Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, 2012, http://reference.works.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/people-of-the-book-SIM_00319

⁴¹ Abu Hamdan, Muhammad, *Ḥaḡiqat Mawqif al-Islām min al-Adyān wal-Madhāhib al-Fikriyyah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Bayruni) pp. 44-45.

historical boundaries and ignore the literal meanings. It would also help to meet the challenges of the multi-religious and pluralistic world, enhance the harmony and coexistence between the people living in multi-faith societies and elaborate the intellectual and philosophical evaluation of the explicit and implicit passages. The other merit of exploring these texts and passages is to endeavour to find out new interpretations and teachings for the Muslims who live in the West and amongst multi-faith societies.

To appreciate the Qur'anic discourse on the People of the Book, the aforementioned classifications can be clarified from two discourse perspectives (explicit, implicit, and polemical; and positive, negative, and polemical), which will facilitate reflection on and aid in the interpretation of each form of address or discourse. This will be done through contextualization by examining the historical context, then providing an analysis of these passages and texts in the selected Qur'anic exegeses. The chapters of the thesis in part one and two will be divided according to these classifications—namely, explicit, and implicit and the third type of discourse i.e. polemical will be chapter seven in part three. I will further highlight and subclassify these into positive, negative, and polemical passages.

Definitions of Important Terminology

Prior to delving into the discussion, it is necessary to understand the definitions of the Arabic terminology employed in the thesis. These include: the *Qur'an*, *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, and *Ahl Al-Dhimma*. The word 'Qur'an' derives from the verbal root *Qara'a* which means to 'recite' or 'read'. Usage of this term might refer to the entire Qur'an or selected passages of it. The word '*iqra*', which is the first word that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) received as revelation, is derived from the same root and is the command form of *Qara'a*. Bell (d. 1952 CE) believes that the term Qur'an is derived from the Syriac *qeryānā*.⁴² There are other names given to the Qur'an, such as *Al-Furqān* (Q 2:53) (The Criterion), *Al-Dhikr* (The Remembrance) (Q 15:9, 43:44) and the term *tanzīl* (Revelation).⁴³ The Qur'an is also described as *mubīn* (Clear), *mubārak* (Blessed), *majīd* (Glorious) and *karīm* (Noble) in many *Sūrahs*. These terms are

⁴² 'Ali, Muhammad Mohar, *The Qur'an and the Orientalists*, (Ipswich: Jam'iyyat 'Ihya' Manhaj Al-Sunnah, 2004) p. 114

⁴³ See Az-Zarkashī, Badr Al-Dīn, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Ma'rifah, 1972) vol. 4, p. 128

designations of the whole text of the Qur'an which is divided by revelation into 114 *Sūrahs*, with each *Sūrah* further divided into a number of *ayahs*, or verses.

The second important term, which will be defined both separately and jointly, is *Ahl Al-Kitāb*. In order to establish a clear understanding of this term, it is necessary to compare a range of different perspectives regarding the concept of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* from within the Islamic exegeses and Western writings. In the Arabic language, the term *Ahl*, when used with reference to a person, signifies a familial relation to the said person. The term *kitāb* is derived from the root verb *kataba*, which literally means 'to write down'. The exegetes usually interpret this term according to its context and connect it with the verb *kataba*, which has various meanings.⁴⁴ However, the term *Al-Kitāb* which is repeated around 261 times in the Qur'an, generally refers to the revealed Divine scriptures. In various passages, it is mentioned that whenever God sent prophets and messengers, he sent down with them the *Kitāb* (Q 2:213, 3:81 and 35:25). Sometimes, the *Kitāb* is specified by name, i.e. *Al-Tawrah* (The Torah), *Al-Injīl* (The Gospel), and *Al-Zabūr* (The Psalms) and it means the original word of God revealed to Moses, the original word of God revealed to Jesus, and the original word of God revealed to David respectively. In other words, when the word *Kitāb* is mentioned in the Qur'an referring to the *Injīl*, it means the one original *Injīl* revealed to Jesus before distortion (*Tahrīf*), not the four Gospels existing now.⁴⁵ Many Christians believe that the Gospel was written originally in Greek, under divine inspiration, by the four evangelists in the four canonical texts: the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Luke, and the Gospel of John.

In the Qur'an, the term *Injīl* refers to one singular Gospel which was written according to early Muslim writers, in Hebrew or in Aramaic at the time of Jesus.⁴⁶ It is stated that the earliest translation for the *Injīl* in Arabic appeared after the advent of Islam, and translated from the Greek originals by a Palestinian Christian monk. The Bible in modern times is known as two parts, the Old and New Testament, in which the Hebrew scripture is considered to be as the Word of God included in the Bible. Gabriel Said Reynolds views that the Qur'an is perhaps employing the term Torah to refer to the

⁴⁴ Madigan, Daniel. 'Book.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 20 October 2014 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/book-EQCOM_00027

⁴⁵ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 158

⁴⁶ Griffith, Sidney H., "Gospel", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Consulted online on 25 December 2018 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00177>

Hebrew Bible and *Injil* to the New Testament or the Christian scripture (Q 5:47, 7:157). He maintains that in early Islam, Muslim scholars faced the challenge of whether to consider the Jewish-Christian scriptures as authoritative, even in some passages of the Qur'an authority is given to the Christian scriptures (Q 10:94), similarly in other passages the Qur'an makes the point that these scriptures have been distorted. Consequently, the early Islamic scholars deemed both Jewish and Christian scriptures unauthorised.⁴⁷ This has consequences on the way in which Muslim exegetes would view the Bible and Torah. Historically they have categorised these as Judeo-Christian sources (*Isra'iliyyāt*) which are found in classical *Tafsīr*. The Gospel that the Qur'an confirms is not the Gospel recollected in writing in the Gospels according to the four New Testament evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—as Christians encountered it in the time of the Qur'an's delivery.⁴⁸ Seventh-century Christians were, of course, accustomed to the idea of the one Gospel of Jesus the Messiah as recorded in writing in the four Gospels of the evangelists, which is why they spoke of the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Since the Qur'an's evocation of the Gospel is not textual but oral, it is not surprising that it does not mention the Gospels. However, it was on its own recognizance, and given its own distinctive prophetology, that the Qur'an then speaks of the Gospel as a 'scripture' (*Kitāb*) that God sent down to Jesus the Messiah, on the model of the Torah for Moses before him, and of the Qur'an for Muhammad after him. The Qur'an mentions the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an as on a par with one another in (Q 9:111).⁴⁹

The term *Ahl Al-Kitāb* is jointly interpreted by the majority of exegetes to include the followers of the Torah sent down to Moses and the followers of the Gospel sent down to Jesus, peace be upon them. Ibn 'Āshūr maintains that the terms *Tawrāh* and *Injil* in the Qur'an refer to the two revelations to Moses and Jesus and compiled by their companions.⁵⁰ Therefore, the term *Al-Kitāb* in *Ahl Al-Kitāb* refers to the Torah, the

⁴⁷ Reynolds, Gabriel Said, *'The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary'* (London:Yale University Press, 2018)

⁴⁸ Griffith, Sidney H. "The Bible in the Qur'an; the Qur'an in the Bible: Scriptural Intertextuality in the Language of Islam." *Books and Readers in the Premodern World: Essays in Honor of Harry Gamble*, edited by Karl Shuve, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2018, pp. 137–170. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.cdb2hnsqz.11.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ MS: Ibn Āshūr, Al-Ṭāhir, *Al-Taḥrīr, wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiyyalin-Nashr, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 58, and 73

Gospel, and the Psalms.⁵¹ Ibn Qudāmah quoted the passage in (Q 6:156)⁵² to support this view.⁵³ The *Shāfiʿī* and *Ḥanbalī* schools of jurisprudence also agree with this view.⁵⁴ However, the contemporary exegetes have not given clear explanation or interpretation whether this term refers to People of the Book who met Prophet Muhammad in Madinah only, or People of the Book at all times and places.⁵⁵ They also have not given clear explanation as to which group of Jews or Christians these texts are intended or meant for (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Liberal, Reformist, Methodist...etc.). However, they view that it could include all groups of Jews and Christians, even the later groups of them, unless there is a context or a clear reference to that past history, because the Qurʾan does not specify clearly which groups. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not mention in his traditions specific groups of People of the Book. Therefore, the Qurʾanic materials about them apply to all who follow the Torah or the Gospel in every environment and time.⁵⁶ In other words, the term extends to include every Jew and Christian at any time and place. Divisions and the sects we see nowadays amongst the Jews and Christians are still considered and called followers of Judaism and Christianity. Similarly, the divisions and various groups amongst Muslims such as *Sunnī*, *Shīʿa*, *Ṣūfī*, *Salafī*, *Ikhwānī* are all considered Muslims and called followers of Islam. When the Qurʾan addresses Muslims, it does not intend to be for a specific group of Muslims.

M. Arkoun (d. 2010 CE) agrees that the term *Ahl Al-Kitāb* refers specifically to the Jews and the Christians whom Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) met in Makkah and Madinah; however, he argues this term should be extended to include all believers who are favoured by God and who accept the new revelation. He also admits that there are other passages which identify *Ahl Al-Kitāb* (the People of the Book) as those who rejected Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his message, who refused the Qurʾan, and who changed the meaning of their scripture. Arkoun maintains that the concept of the People of the Book is a living one that can be developed to mean 'the societies of the book', and suggests numerous ways for achieving that aim. Through these ways

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² '...Lest you say, 'Scriptures were only sent down to two communities before us...' (Q 6:156)

⁵³ Ibn Qudāmah, *Al-Mughnī*, (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Riyadh al-Hadīthah, 1997) vol. 6, pp. 590-591.

⁵⁴ Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Abu Bakr, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾan*, (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub, 1992) vol. 2, p. 327

⁵⁵ MS: Al-Shaʿrāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qurʾan al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), vol.1 p. 158

⁵⁶ Sharon, M., "People of the Book", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan*, Consulted online on 26 December 2018 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00319>

the concept of the People of the Book can be developed to become compatible with all times and places.⁵⁷

The *Ḥanafīs* view this term as more comprehensive, including all those who have received a divine scripture or religious guidelines in the form of a book, scrolls, or parchment. They further maintain that the Sabians⁵⁸, *Majūs* (Zoroastrians), and the followers of other world religions are also included. The term Sabians is mentioned three times as '*Sābi'ūn*' in the Qur'an, in *Sūrahs* (Q 2:62, 5:69 and 22:17), without clear identification. The three passages do not mention whether they follow a specific Book or set of beliefs. In this case, some exegetes have identified this group as worshippers of the stars. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH/923 CE) mentions that they are a community between Zoroastrians and Jews. Al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370AH/980 CE), a *Ḥanafī* scholar, agrees with the mainstream *Ḥanafī* definition of this term, excluding the Zoroastrians.⁵⁹ As the argument concludes, Muslims may also be included literally under the term 'People of the Book'.⁶⁰

The other significant term is *Ahl Al-Dhimmah*, a term similar to the People of the Book, but it is not mentioned frequently in the Qur'an. This term is mainly employed by jurists to refer to non-Muslim communities (Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, or others) who live under Muslim rule with a covenant of protection and freedom to practise their faith.⁶¹ The Zoroastrians and Sabians are also mentioned alongside the People of the Book in passage (Q 22:17) and are regarded to be among the protected minorities. Subsequently, the term 'People of the Book' is used to refer to *Ahl Al-Dhimmah* living under Islamic rule. The word *Dhimmah* is repeated twice in *Sūrah At-Tawbah* (9: 8–10) to refer to a covenant or treaty, without indications of its later juristic formulation.⁶²

⁵⁷ Wahyudi, Jarot, *Exegetical Analysis of the Ahl Al-Kitāb Verse of the Qur'an*, Islamic Studies, vol. 37, no. 4 (Winter 1998), pp. 425-443 Published by: Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad.

⁵⁸ The term *Sabians* mentioned in the Qur'an is different from the term Sabaeans, which refers to the inhabitants of Sheba '*Saba*' in Yemen.

⁵⁹ Sharon, M. 'People of the Book.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, University of Exeter. 12 August 2012 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Qur'an/people-of-the-book-SIM_00319

⁶⁰ See Jarot Wahyudi, '*Ahl al-Kitāb in the Qur'an: An Analysis of Selected Classical and Modern Exegesis*, Islamic Studies, Vol. 37, No. 4 (1998), pp. 425-443 Published by: Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad

⁶¹ Sharon, M. 'People of the Book.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, University of Exeter. 12 August 2012 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Qur'an/people-of-the-book-SIM_00319

⁶² Ibid.

This term first appeared during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), at the time when he expanded his authority over Arabia and concluded agreements of protection with the Jews of Madinah and Christians of Najran in Arabia⁶³ (see Q 9: 29).⁶⁴

Literature Review

The literature written on the subject of Qur'anic exegesis and the People of the Book is an ongoing discussion amongst Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. Studies on Jews and Christians in the Qur'an have been written in both Arabic and English, on matters such as Jews and Judaism, *Banī Isrā'īl*, the dialogue with the People of the Book, Jesus (pbuh), and Christianity and Islam. There are classical as well as modern Western works on Muslim-Christian and Jewish-Muslim relations. Similarly, numerous studies on Jewish-Christian scriptures in the Qur'an and in Muslim traditions and culture have also been conducted. Despite the compendium of studies conducted on the topics already mentioned, it is sufficient to focus on literature published by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars concerning the following topics: the People of the Book, the Qur'an, and Qur'anic exegesis.

A recent study about the People of the Book in the Qur'an is that of M. K. N. A. Al-Ali, titled '*The Qur'anic Attitude towards the People of the Book*.'⁶⁵ Focusing on references in the Qur'an and *Ḥadīth* related to the People of the Book, it discusses their beliefs and scriptures. By analysing the attitude of the prophetic traditions towards them, it discusses the historical background and the environment in which the Qur'an was sent down—the era of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). A major focus of the study is the conditions in Arabia and the influence of Judeo-Christian customs that were there at the time. It analyses nine passages of the Qur'an to demonstrate the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book. The researcher's approach is historical rather than exegetical and highlights the environment of Arabia in which the Qur'an was revealed. Although his study bears some similarities to the subject of this thesis, the latter offers a fresh approach and focus which demonstrates to what extent these classical and

⁶³ Cahen, Cl. 'Dhimma. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online , 2012. Reference, University of Exeter. 11 August 2014 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dhimma-SIM_1823>

⁶⁴ 'Fight those of the People of the Book who do not (truly) believe in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not obey the rule of justice, until they pay the tax and agree to submit.' (see Q 9:29)

⁶⁵ See, M. K. N. A. Al-Ali, '*The Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book*, (Unpublished Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2003)

contemporary exegeses understand the Qur'anic discourse on People of the Book and to what extent do the contemporary exegeses reinterpret these passages relating to People of the Book. It will also introduce a fresh explanation to the classification of the Qur'anic discourse on Jews and Christians.

Similarly, M. H. Al-Denawy's *A Reappraisal of Attitudes to the People of the Book in the Qur'an and Ḥadīth, with Particular Reference to Muslim Fiscal Policy and the Covenant of 'Umar*⁶⁶ discusses the People of the Book in the Qur'an in the first chapter. The researcher analyses a specific number of passages that praise or criticise the People of the Book in the selected exegeses. The remaining chapters discuss the attitude of *ḥadīth* toward the People of the Book, poll tax (*jizyah*), land tax (*kharāj*), tithe (*'ushr*), and finally the covenant of 'Umar Ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 644 CE) with the Christians. The aim of the research, serving the purpose of an interfaith project, focused on the era of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to establish the argument that a pragmatic relationship existed between him and the People of the Book in Arabia.

In the following section, I will review some of the relevant works that have been compiled by Western and non-Western scholars and orientalists from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. During the middle of the nineteenth century, scholars such as Nöldeke (d. 1930 CE), Goldziher (d. 1920 CE), and William Muir (d. 1905 CE) developed theories about the authenticity of the Qur'an; the text, its chronology, revelation, transmission, exegesis, and other matters. These works and their conclusions were developed further by other scholars in the second half of the twentieth century, chiefly by Richard Bell (d. 1952 CE), and his student M. Watt (d. 2006 CE). Later, other Western scholars (known as revisionists), such as J. Wansbrough (d. 2002 CE), Patricia Crone (b. 1945 CE), and Michael Cook (b. 1940 CE), proposed new theories and assumptions about the Qur'an and exegeses. These were summarised and publicised by Andrew Rippin (d. 2016 CE), Ibn Warraq (b. 1946 CE), Toby Lester, and others.⁶⁷ Other recent and relevant works are also significant to refer to such as works for Jane Damman McAuliffe, Gabriel Said Renolds, Mun'im Sirry, and Claude Gilliot.

⁶⁶ Al-Denawy, M. H. 'A Reappraisal of Attitudes to the 'People of the Book' in the Qur'an and Ḥadīth, with Particular Reference to Muslim Fiscal Policy and the Covenant of 'Umar.' (Unpublished thesis, Durham University, 2006)

⁶⁷ 'Ali, Muhammad Mohar, *The Qur'an and the Orientalists*, (Ipswich: Jam'iyyat 'Ihya' Manhaj Al-Sunnah, 2004) pp. 2-3

Theodor Nöldeke's work was the first Western systematic consideration of the history of the Qur'an.⁶⁸ He focuses on the origin of the Qur'an, the assumed influence of the Judeo-Christian sources, the revelation, the exegesis and the exegetes in the early era of Islam (such as Ibn 'Abbās and his students), the Islamic sources, mainly Al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* and *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* by Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), the collection of the Qur'an and its composition, and tracing the chronological order of the *Sūrahs*.

Richard Bell and W. M. Watt are amongst the scholars who have significant influence on the Western studies of the Qur'an. In *The Introduction to the Qur'an*, revised by Watt, Bell discusses the views of Western and Muslim scholars on the form, chronology, and history of the Qur'an, as well as the historical background of Prophet Muhammad's life and character. Like Nöldeke, he is well known for textually rearranging the Qur'an in his major work *The Qur'an Translated, with a Critical Rearrangement of the Sūrahs*. W. M. Watt compiled various scholarly studies of the Qur'an and Islam, and revised Bell's book *The Introduction to the Qur'an* in 1970. He further authored works such as *Prophet Muhammad at Mecca* (1953), *Prophet Muhammad at Medina* (1956) and *Prophet Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman* (1961), a popular abridgement of the previous two books.⁶⁹

John Wansbrough (d. 2002 CE), a foremost proponent of the revisionist approach, authored a collection of works on the Qur'an and Islamic studies which deeply influenced British and Western scholarship. This influence emerges more strongly in his two books on Qur'anic studies.⁷⁰ Amongst them were Crone, Cook and Gerd R. Puin (b. 1940 CE), who examined the ancient Qur'anic manuscript discovered in 1972 in Ṣana'ā. Wansbrough's theory encouraged Puin to see the texts of the Qur'an as mixed and unclear.⁷¹ Toby Lester (b. 1964 CE) relates that Puin's examination revealed unconventional passage orderings, minor textual variations, and rare styles of orthography and artistic embellishment.⁷²

⁶⁸ Published for the first time in 1860

⁶⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2006/nov/14/guardianobituaries.highereducation>

⁷⁰ See Qur'anic Studies: *Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* by John Wansbrough
Review by: William A. Graham *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 100, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1980), pp. 137-141

⁷¹ Some of Puin's initial remarks on his discoveries are mentioned in his essay titled the 'Observations on Early Qur'an Manuscripts in San'a' which has been republished in the book 'What the Koran Really Says' by Ibn Warraq.

⁷² http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/01/what-is-the-koran/304024/?single_page=true

Andrew Rippin (b. 1950 CE) is another Western scholar who authored a number of works on the Qur'an and its exegesis, most notably in his book '*The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition*', which includes 21 of his articles. An important contribution to the scholarship of the Qur'an and its sciences, the collected articles were written by highly qualified Western scholars and discuss the Qur'anic text, history and development of exegesis, history of the text, the exegetical genre of the occasions of revelation and its function, the exegesis of Ibn 'Abbās, *naskh al-Qur'an* and problems of the early exegeses, as well as Wansbrough's methodology concerning the literary analysis of the Qur'an, exegesis and *Sīrah* (Biography of Prophet Muhammad).⁷³

The other writer in this area is Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Her publications include *Qur'anic Christians: an analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, and the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an, With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, the *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, and the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*. Her work is '*Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, attempts to analyse the Muslim exegetes attitude toward Christians and explain their Qur'anic image as people and turn the focus of discussion from Jesus as a person to the focus on Christians as people. McAuliffe (b. 1944 CE), analyses the views of ten exegetes on a set of seven Qur'anic passages about Christians, and then draws certain conclusions about the Muslim exegetical tradition and interreligious relations. Representative *Sunnī* and *Shī'a* exegetes from classical and modern times are discussed, and Persian as well as Arabic commentaries are used as McAuliffe analyses these passages within these ten different exegeses and discusses the occasions of revelation and the historical context for them: 2:62, 3:55, 3:199, 5:66, 5:82–83, 28:52–55, and 57:27, and the views of ten exegetes: Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), Al-Ṭūsī (d. 1066–7 CE), Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH), Abu Al-Futūḥ Rāzī (d. 1131CE), Ibn Al-Jawzī (d. 1256 CE), Al-Rāzī (d. 1209 CE), Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373 CE), Al-Kāshānī (d. 1580 CE), Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935 CE) and Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1982 CE).

⁷³ See Rippin, Andrew, *The Qur'an and its Interpretative Tradition*, (UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001) Hampshire, p. xvi.

Her aim is to see how Christians have been conceived within the Islamic exegeses: classical and contemporary.⁷⁴ She draws attention to the several grammatical, semantic, and doctrinal issues which the Qur'anic passages raise and which the exegetes had to deal with before formulating their opinion. McAuliffe chooses to concentrate on the classical and modern Qur'anic exegeses; however, in the first chapter of Part I she presented a clear overview of the formative period of the the exegeses from the emergence of exegetical *ḥadīth* and the exegesis of the Tabiun to the controversial early exegeses ascribed to Mujāhid (d. 104/722) and Muqatil (d. 150/767). Moreover, she refers to the thorny issues of the history of Qur'anic text and the controversy over the origin of *ḥadīth*, and gives what seems an impartial account of the hypercritical views of the sceptics (e.g. J. Wansbrough, I. Goldziher, and J. Schacht). It seems that she was more sympathetic to a conventional approach advocated by A. Rippin, J. Coulson, D. Powers, and, partly, by G. H. A. Juynboll.⁷⁵ She concludes that most of these passages are from the Madinah period and show praise and respect to Christians.⁷⁶

Another recent work written by Mun'im Sirry⁷⁷ is '*Scriptural Polemics, the Qur'an and Other Religions*'. In it, he discusses a number of Qur'anic passages critical of Jews and Christians, such as those featuring claims of exclusive salvation, charges of Jewish and Christian falsification of revelation, and cautions against the taking of Jews or Christians as patrons, allies, or intimates. Sirry regards such polemical texts as obstacles to peaceable interreligious relations, and considers them through the lens of twentieth-century exegeses (six modern exegetes). Sirry answered important questions including how modern contexts have framed Muslim reformers' understanding of the Qur'an, and how the reformers' interpretations re-contextualised these passages. His work provides both a critical engagement with the exegeses and the Qur'anic language and demonstrates how the dynamic and varied reformist interpretations of these passages open the way for a less polemical approach towards other religions.

⁷⁴ McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). p. 27

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 24-36

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Mun'im Sirry is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Theology in the University of Notre Dame. He received his PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Moreover, it emphasises that modernism expects all faiths to be tolerated and respected, and that no religion can claim to be superior or the absolute truth in comparison to another. It is these attitudes, towards religions in the modern era, which hinders some Muslim scholars from discussing the polemical passages about People of the Book in the Qur'an. Nonetheless ignoring the polemical passage is far from a solution, without a scholarly discussion on this topic—radical thought has room to sprout and cause more harm than good, justifying violence towards those of non-Islamic faith. Sirry, counteracts these radical perceptions with a scholarly discussion of polemical passages. He argues the necessity to do so, within a modern context. The primary factor of it is to ask the question 'why polemical texts exist in the Qur'an.' By analysing these passages with the wider context of the Prophet's mission and his encounter with other religions in the advent of religion, he intended to shed light to answer the above question.⁷⁸

Although the passages of the Qur'an have been discussed with the context and experience of the Prophet Muhammad, to determine the intended meaning and objective, it must be noted that the Qur'an is by no means the spiritual experience of the Prophet's mission. Western scholars, have tried to link the life of the Prophet to that of the Qur'an, thus deeming the Qur'an as a historical document of the Prophet's life. Revisionist Western scholars have argued that Christian and Jewish influence entered the Qur'an, particularly the discussion of the 'Garden of Eden', the virgin birth of 'Isa and the stories of Children of Israel. They challenged the old notions of narrative and concluded the polemical passages were 'sectarian' influence. Yet others argue, the polemical passages reflect Christian strophic hymns. Nonetheless, the western arguments relating to the Qur'an lack conformity and are in disarray. Far removed from providing useful explanations in respect to the polemical passages with People of the Book, rather the arguments are focused on disowning the Qur'an's divine nature and associating its authorship to Muhammad.⁷⁹

Sirry disagreed with the above conclusions drawn by Western scholars, his argument was that even if one was to agree that Muhammad was in communication with God alone, without borrowing Judeo-Christian sources from earlier scriptures, the Qur'anic

⁷⁸ Sirry, Mun'im, *Scriptural Polemics, The Qur'an and Other Religions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp. 33-34

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 34-35

discourse relating to the Jews and Christians touched on familiarities of prophets and narrations found in their own scriptures, to draw their attention to the revelation. If the Qur'an ignored this point, then how would have those with who Muhammad was in communication, established common grounds with him?⁸⁰ Nonetheless to consider the Prophet's position with the Qur'an and his mission is a necessary source to understand the passages of the Qur'an. Like previous scriptures the Qur'an also reflects the 'mood and attitude' of earlier believing communities at the early stages of their faith. Considering the hostile environments in which Islam was revealed, it is not surprising that at some points the Qur'an adopted a harsh tone towards older religious communities who it deemed, were deliberately distorting the Word of God. In this context, the Qur'an uses language to identify and distinguish the believing communities.⁸¹

Gabriel Said Reynolds has written important works on the Qur'anic and Biblical studies, the historical context of the Qur'an, and the connection between the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Qur'an. In his work '*The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary*', Reynolds draws on centuries of Qur'anic and Biblical studies to present revelatory commentary on how these sacred Books are related. This work is considered a contribution to the religious studies and features a full translation of the Qur'an along with excerpts from the Jewish and Christian texts. It offers a clear analysis of the polemics within the communities of religious scholars concerning the link between these Books, providing a new lens through which to view the connection that bonds these three major religions. Although the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are understood to be related texts, the Qur'an has generally been considered separately. Reynolds demonstrates how Jewish and Christian characters, imagery, and literary devices feature prominently in the Qur'an, including stories of angels bowing before Adam and of Jesus speaking as an infant. Reynolds work does not reflect the same methodology used by earlier exegetes who organised the Qur'an in two sections Makkan and Madinan, neither does he refer to occasions of revelation

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 35

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 36

which closely follow the life or mission of Muhammad. In doing so, he had hoped to study the Qur'an and its relationship to biblical passages in the absence of context.⁸²

Reynolds notes that the Bible in modern times is known as two parts, the Old and New Testament, in which the Hebrew scripture is considered to be the Word of God included in the Bible. In early Islam, scholars faced the challenge of whether to consider the Jewish-Christian scriptures as authoritative, even in some passages of the Qur'an authority is given to the Christian scriptures (Q 10:94), similarly in other passages the Qur'an makes the point that these scriptures have been distorted. Consequently, the early Islamic scholars deemed both Jewish and Christian scriptures unauthorised. This decision has consequences on the ways in which Muslim exegetes would view the Bible and Torah. Historically they have categorised these as Judeo-Christian sources which are found in classical *Tafsīr*.⁸³ Reynold claims, the Qur'anic passages are compared to the many different Jewish and Christian sources, which he suggests as an emergence from the existing traditions. The fact that the Qur'an addresses or encompasses passages concerning other faiths is of no surprise, since it is the first of Arabic literature to emerge in the Late Antique Eastern religious history, it merged the existing religious literary traditions of its time.⁸⁴

Another important work by Reynolds is '*The Qur'an in its Historical Context*' which provides commentary on the controversial revisionist school of Qur'anic studies. In the last few decades, works by western revisionist and controversial scholars like John Wansbrough, Günter Lüling, Christoph Luxenberg, Yehuda Nevo, and others presented a set of theories about the authenticity and origin of the Qur'an, challenging the master narrative of Western Qur'anic studies since T. Noldeke and dismissing the classic Sunnī Muslim sources, without providing any generally accepted alternative. Reynolds assembled a conference at the University of Notre Dame in 2005 to discuss the current stance in Qur'anic studies, and this work edited by him is based on the papers presented at that conference. While there was no consensus among the scholars at the conference, this work is considered to be a good contribution to understanding the present problems of Western Qur'anic studies and the positions

⁸² Reynolds, Gabriel Said, '*The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary*' (London:Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 3-4

⁸³ Ibid., p. 1-2

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.9

regarding them of some major scholars in the field. Renolds discovers the origins, scholarship and development of the Qur'an in this work. He critically discusses the most controversial issues in modern studies on the Qur'an.

Another recent work has been written by Johanna Pink⁸⁵ on *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today, Media, Genealogies and Interpretative Community*. Pink endeavours to provide a fresh outlook on the Qur'anic interpretation in the present day through analysing the political, social and historical dimensions in which they occur. She gives an overview of the most important trends and historical conditions and antecedents that frame the contemporary approaches of the Qur'an. She also tries to explain the context in which the contemporary exegesis of the Qur'an occurs and demonstrate how this context formed the style and the content of the exegesis. She also discusses the increasingly diverse types and orientation of exegeses among Muslims and the clashes which might occur. She also analyses the media by which they are transmitted, and the ways in which they are performed. Pink relies on a very recent sources for her study dating from the mid 2000s to 2016, the perspective she took on these sources is historical.⁸⁶

Pink has raised some questions on how Muslim scholars are interpreting the Qur'an and why they are eager to do it. She answered the first question by presenting various modern approaches i.e. historical, genealogical, and media examples throughout the book, and introduced examples for each approach for scholars from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Iran, and other Muslim countries in order to show the reader the fast transformation, changes and development of Muslim exegesis in recent decades. She has also given examples of various orientations of exegeses such as Modernist, Salafi, Islamist, and Shī'a orientation. According to her, Muslim scholars give much attention nowadays to exegeses of the Qur'an because the Qur'an has always been the holy scripture that is central to Muslim discourses on many important religious issues related to creed, belief, Islamic law, *ḥadīths*, morals and others.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Johanna Pink is the professor for Islamic Studies and the History of Islam at the University of Freiburg since 2012. Her research interests include early modern and modern Qur'anic exegesis, Qur'an translations with a special focus on Indonesia, the status of non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies and religious discourses, and the recent history of Egypt.

⁸⁶ Pink, Johanna, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today, Media, Genealogies and Interpretative Community*, (UK: Equinox, 2019) pp. 5-10

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 14

This book illuminates the context in which contemporary Qur'anic interpretation takes place and explains how that context shapes the style and contents of the exegesis. It does not take any of these modern phenomena that shape contemporary interpretation as given, but seeks to show where they come from, adding historical depths to the analysis. This study further substantiates its arguments with an array of case studies of concrete exegetical sources that have been chosen because they illustrate and represent particular phenomena, discourses, communities, exegetical methods, aims or media. Contemporary Muslim Qur'anic interpretation cannot be reduced to the genre of the Qur'anic commentary. The genealogical nature of that genre is not the only reason for pursuing a genealogical approach. The main advantage of that approach is the fact that it does not focus on 'origins' as much as it tries to take stock of present phenomena and developments. The analysis of contemporary Muslim interpretations of the Qur'an is, therefore, primarily an attempt to describe the forms, concerns and structural conditions in which they appear, but also to understand the genealogy of these trends and conditions, outlining their emergence, their development and their relevance to specific actors in this space.⁸⁸

These Western scholars introduced their views and ideas on the Qur'an to Western audiences. They discuss and study specific subject, either about Muslim exegesis, or about the Qur'an as text, or about the People of the Book in the Qur'an, or Jews in the Qur'an or Christians in the Qur'an. They also discuss these subjects with their own methodology within specific era of Islamic history, or discuss it within specific school of exegeses. None, as far as I know, has presented a comprehensive study about the Qur'anic discourse on Jews and Christians in the three selected exegeses. Recently, Muslim scholars of Islamic studies in Western universities have profoundly disagreed with the assumptions and theories of their non-Muslim colleagues and developed novel methodologies in approaching Qur'anic exegesis, marrying elements of the traditional Islamic and modern Western schools.

Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988 CE), for example, sought to reconcile traditional Islamic methods and contemporary Western hermeneutics. Rahman introduced a new method for discovering the universal and inner meaning of the Qur'an, thereby releasing its eternal message from adaptation to the historical circumstances of

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 8

Prophet Muhammad's mission. The revelation of the Qur'an in the early period of Islam consisted of religious, social, and moral teachings regarding specific issues in concrete historical circumstances. Therefore, he argues that the process of exegesis in a contemporary context requires a double movement; consideration from the present circumstances to the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), then back again to the present. Rahman's approach includes three stages: first, the scholar or exegete should understand the meaning of the passage by studying the historical background or context for which it provided an answer. Secondly, those answers should be generalised and declared as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be distilled from the specific texts in light of the socio-historical background. Thirdly, the general moral objective needs to be embodied into the present concrete socio-historical context.⁸⁹

Rahman, has separated the Qur'an from its messenger. The Qur'an is timeless, while the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was a human, and God informed us that 'Muhammad is but a messenger; other prophets have passed away before him' (Q 3:144). To analyse the Qur'an only in light of the place and time of revelation is a mistake, the message has been delivered as timeless guidance, and the source is Divine and Eternal. The first mistake of orientalists is that they initially approach the Qur'an as a text authored by the Prophet, without assuming it as the Divine word of God, or even humouring this possibility for academic study. Rahman further argues that exegesis of the Qur'an should be developed in order to understand its relevance to contemporary issues. In his book, *Major themes of the Qur'an*, he discussed the subject of the People of the Book and religious diversity and analysed some of the texts related to Jews and Christians. He also responded to some of the assumptions made by Western scholars relating to the originality of the Qur'an, the message of Muhammad (pbuh), and his relationship with Jews and Christians in Makkah and Madinah.⁹⁰

The relation of this subject to others mentioned and carried out is only in the matter of the subject. Although it has been studied both in the works described above and

⁸⁹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) pp. 6-7

⁹⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) pp. 162-170

elsewhere from different perspectives, this study does not aim to duplicate those previously undertaken on the topic of early exegeses on Jews and Christians. Rather, it seeks to build on them and provide a novel and different approach to the topic by investigating to what extent have contemporary exegetes contextualised, introduced a modern approach, and expanded explanation and interpretation to the texts and passages related to the People of the Book. It also demonstrates how the Jews and Christians are reflected in the classical and contemporary exegeses. It also seeks to analyse the Qur'anic discourse on the People of the Book in both the Makkan and Madinan revelation, while exploring the reasons for the negative and positive discourses in both periods.

Sources

The exegetical and theological focus of this thesis requires the bibliography to depend on sources in both Arabic and English. The primary source for Arabic will be *Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah* or MS⁹¹ (the Electronic Comprehensive Library), which contains a number of works covering all fields of Islamic sciences including all well-known exegeses. The encyclopaedia includes various types of exegeses i.e classical and contemporary.

The main source in the first two parts of the thesis is the following classical exegesis '*Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy Al-Qur'ān*' by Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE). In the last part, which is the major part of the thesis, I will rely on the following two contemporary exegeses: *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* by Ibn 'Āshūr (d. 1973 CE), and *Khawāṭir Hawla al-Qur'an* by M. M. Sha'rāwī (d. 1998 CE). In addition, I will occasionally refer to other *Tafāsīr* such as those by Al-Rāzī (d. 1210) *At-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, *Al-Manār* by Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935 CE), Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH), and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1961 CE) and others.

The other major source of exegesis is *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* (The Verification and Enlightenment) by Ibn 'Āshūr (d. 1973 CE), which is also a fundamental contemporary contribution to Islamic scholarship. Ibn 'Āshūr attempts to enlighten the Muslim mind,

⁹¹ *Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah* (the Comprehensive Library) or MS is an electronic library which contains more than 8000 books of all fields of Islamic sciences: sciences of the Qur'an, major books of exegeses, jurisprudence, *Ḥadīth*, comparative religion, and creed. I will refer to it in the footnote with the initials MS.

while constructing a modern approach and methodology to the text of the Qur'an. He used many exegeses as references, but sought not to give any of them undue attention. For this reason, he named his *Tafsīr Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*. In his introduction, he explained his approach and vision of the exegesis as a field of Islamic scholarship. He maintains that exegesis is the science of searching for the meaning of words and what might be derived from them superficially or from in-depth extrapolation. At present, and in contrast to the large number of studies on the works of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, there exists little material in the English language on Ibn 'Āshūr, his biography, and contribution.⁹²

The third major source considered in the main part of the present study is *Khawāṭir Ḥawla al-Qur'ān* (My Qur'anic Reflections) by the popular Egyptian scholar and exegete M. M. Sha'rāwī (d. 1998 CE). He is a graduate of Al-Azhar and was minister of the Awqaf (Endowments). In addition to his interpretations of the Qur'an, he also authored books on the Qur'anic *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Stories of Prophets), in which he describes the life of Jesus (pbuh) and discusses the polemic passages on his status. The *Tafsīr* of Sha'rāwī is distinguished by combining rational opinion (*ra'y*) with traditions; it is distinguished by its simplicity of language, refutation of orientalist claims about the Qur'an and Islam's teachings, and its clarification both of the Qur'an's inimitability and the miracles contained in the text. He is also distinguished for interpreting the passages of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in a balanced approach between the classical and contemporary *Tafāsīr*, avoiding Judeo-Christian sources and narrations as a reference. In doing so, he formulated a unique methodology on how the Qur'an addresses *Ahl Al-Kitāb*. Therefore, his contribution is given serious consideration in the analyses of the Qur'anic passages related to People of the Book. It is for this reason, he has been selected for consideration in the last, and major, part of this thesis. These *Tafāsīr* represent a significant contribution to the Islamic scholarship of exegesis, for they adopt a modern approach to interpreting the Qur'an for compatibility with modern life, addressing new issues facing contemporary Muslims. Few English language studies exist on the matter of the People of the Book in these particular exegeses. This study will thus provide a valuable contribution to the scholarship on these specific exegeses with regard to the People of the Book in the English language.

⁹² M. Nafi, Basheer, *Tahir ibn 'Āshūr: The Career And Thought Of A Contemporary Reformist Alim*, Journal of Qur'anic Studies, vol. 7, No. 1 (2005), pp. 1-32.

In addition, secondary sources that will be consulted include occasions of revelation, like *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* by Al-Wāḥidī (d. 468 AH/1075 CE). This is the first comprehensive book that seeks to clarify the story of revelation in response to an increase in exegetes whose interpretation of the Qur'an and passages pertaining to Jews and Christians appear ungrounded in detailed or expert knowledge.⁹³ The occasion of revelation will clarify the historical context of the text, and elaborate on the time, place, and circumstances of passages addressing the People of the Book. Before Islamic history can assume any function in the interpretation of the Qur'an, the historical events surrounding the origins of the Qur'an and the first proclamation of particular chapters and verses have to be established. The Qur'an is said to have been revealed over a period of 22 years, during which the circumstances of Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community were subject to change. There are problems with this material. Occasions of revelation are only available for a minority of verses. When they are, it frequently happens that several contradictory occasions of revelations are reported. In other instances, an identical story is cited as an occasion of revelation for different verses. In the 20th century, criticism of the occasions of revelation became frequent. Studies demonstrate that a large proportion of the material comes from biographies and was only linked up with the Qur'an at a later stage. Even if an exegete does not take the critical scholarship into account, there are several reasons for which contemporary exegetes assume a more sceptical approach to the material.⁹⁴

Among the other references are Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrah* and that of his student Ibn Hishām (d. 215 AH/830 CE), who edited Ibn Ishāq's biography, deleting portions he found offensive or lacking authentication. They both wrote the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and recorded his relationship with the People of the Book in Makkah and Madinah. Consequently, consideration must also be given to the development of Qur'anic exegesis and the problems or defects related to it in the early period of Islam. The references for this part will rely on Muslim and non-Muslim sources on the development and history of Qur'anic exegesis.⁹⁵ Modern sources

⁹³ Al-Wāḥidī, Abu al-Hasan, *Asbāb An-Nuzūl*, (Beirut: dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1991) p. 10.

⁹⁴ Pink, Johanna, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today, Media, Genealogies and Interpretative Community*, (UK: Equinox, 2019) pp. 132-33

⁹⁵ See *Al-Tafsīr wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*, by Al-Dhahabī, M. Husain, (Cairo: Dar Ihya' Al-Turath, 1976)

which have been written by Muslims and Western scholars will be consulted such as McAuliffe, Sirry, Gabriel Reynolds, Johanna Pink, and Claut Gilliot

This study will also refer to Western sources on the Qur'an, its sciences, and the People of the Book in it. These include the works of Nöldeke (d. 1930), Goldziher (d. 1920 CE) and W. Muir (d. 1905 CE), Richard Bell (d. 1952) and his student M. Watt (d. 2006 CE), J. Wansbrough (d. 2002), Patricia Crone (b. 1945 CE), Michael Cook (b. 1940 CE), Jane Dammen McAuliffe (b. 1944), Andrew Rippin (b. 1950 CE), David Marshall, Hugh Goddard, Ian Netton, Mona Siddiqui, Sajjad Rizvi, and Emran El-Badawi. Academic journals, articles, *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* and online data will also be consulted. The Abdel Haleem translation, *The Qur'an a New Translation*, will be used for translating the passages of the Qur'an.

Aims

The purpose of this study is to introduce to readers a fresh and comprehensive study, as well as an understanding of the different types of Qur'anic discourse about People of the Book, in the classical and contemporary exegeses. It also aims at narrowing the gap of misunderstanding on the image of the Jews and Christians in the Qur'an. The subject of Jews and Christians in the Qur'anic *Tafsīr* has been studied extensively from various scholarly angles and perspectives. This study does not intend to repeat earlier works on Jews and Christians, nor will it be framed as an interfaith project; however, it does aim to build on it and contribute an additional perspective. This is to be achieved by studying this subject matter from an exegetical angle, which has yet to be explored within identified sources and various exegeses.

This study will collate and analyse the Qur'anic passages relating to Jews and Christians in light of contemporary exegesis, particularly Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī, with reflections from Rashīd Riḍā in the conclusion, providing a window to understanding passages of the Qur'an relating to 'The People of the Book' in a contemporary context.

It will carefully examine the reflection of the People of the Book in classical and contemporary exegesis, an area that so far has been lacking significant research. Nevertheless, it will be of interest to scholars and students, with an ever-increasing Muslim population in the West, interaction with non-Muslims in all contexts, including

socially, economically, culturally, and politically, which pressingly requires a comprehensive understanding of Qur'anic guidelines governing them. Ultimately, the nature of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims world-wide is at stake. One of the impetuses (motivations) behind the undertaking of this study is my own role as a Chief Imam which includes visiting churches, synagogues, and other places of worship to meet with priests, rabbis, and other faith leaders. I receive many questions and have many discussions on the Qur'anic discourse and the portrayal of people of other religions, and I have discovered substantial misunderstanding and lack of awareness on this topic.

Therefore, the aim is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'anic discourse about the People of the Book in the exegeses. The contemporary exegetes and reformists Ibn 'Āshūr, and Sha'rāwī, have played an important role in developing the interpretation of these passages, especially the polemical ones, in order to meet the challenges of the multi-religious and pluralistic modern world.

By developing the concept of the People of the Book, the study will demonstrate the connection between the classical and contemporary exegeses. Classical exegeses are undeniably resourceful to date. However, in this subject matter, they offer little interpretation that is compliant with modern multi-faith societies. On the other hand, the contemporary exegetes 'Āshūr, and Sha'rāwī themselves interacted with these multi-faith communities. Hence, their *Tafāsīr* provide an in-depth study of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Qur'an, both contemporary and relevant. Nevertheless, there is still a need for more in-depth studies of *Tafāsīr* on this subject that are compliant with modern society and its changes.

Research Question

In order to achieve the above mentioned aims, the study seeks to answer the following questions: To what extent do the classical and contemporary exegetes understand and contextualise the passages relating to the People of the Book?

There are other subsidiary questions which are linked to the main question and to the theme of the thesis which will be answered throughout the thesis. These questions are: Do these passages demonstrate the categorisation of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* into negative, positive, polemical aspects? How do the Muslim exegetes understand this

categorisation in the Makkan and Madinan Qur'an? Can these passages, as interpreted by Muslim exegetes, be considered as evidence for a neutral attitude and tone towards other faiths? Do they demonstrate the possibility of achieving salvation for these groups of faiths?

Methodology

The methodology will be based on qualitative discourse analysis reflecting the thematic approach to Qur'anic exegesis regarding specific passages and how they were interpreted and can be reinterpreted considering contemporary realities. Discourse analysis is an important discipline within linguistics regarding texts and utterances and how they can be contextualised.⁹⁶ In addition discourse analysis is an examination of the body of knowledge and the employment of critical social theory regarding ideas or "patterned ways of thinking..".⁹⁷ Employing the thematic discourse analysis framework will help one in examining dichotomies and constructions of scholars of exegesis. In this way, I will be able to critically analyse the different discourses of the Qur'an on the people of the Book whether in the Makkan or Madinan verses.

Thus, I will analyse the exegetical proof from the primary sources through a comparative and analytical investigation in order to critically examine the understanding of the classical and contemporary exegeses to the Qur'anic discourses on the People of the Book. In order to examine this fluctuating discourse properly, I have adopted a discourse analysis approach to compare and analyse these sources and evaluate their status, and qualifications in the area of *Tafsīr* in order to discover the portrayal of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the commentaries of exegetes. This methodology enables me to investigate these sources and identify to what extent do the classical and contemporary exegetes understand the Qur'anic discourse on the Jews and Christians.

Moreover, I have adopted this methodology to investigate the types of this discourse in these passages on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the three selected exegetes and to determine how they interpret these passages through the historical contextualisation in their

⁹⁶ Jones, Rodney H. Discourse Analysis, New York, Oxon, Routledge, 2012, pp.1-16

⁹⁷ See, Powers, penny, The Methodology of Discourse Analysis, London, Jones and Barlett Publishers Canada, 2001, pp.1-25

commentaries. This methodology will also aid in identifying the perspectives of categorisation of this discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb*: the first perspective being positive, negative and polemical; and the second perspective being: explicit, implicit and political; and to what extent these exegetes understand this categorisation in the Makkan and Madinan Qur'an? Furthermore, analysing the Makkan and Madinan passages of the Qur'an and the historical context related to the People of the Book will demonstrate the change of discourse in the two periods.

The discourse analysis methodology will also help to determine the way in which the passages on the People of the Book are contextualised in the classical and the contemporary exegeses. It will investigate the political and social impact on the modern exegesis and the tension between local and global forces; tension between the hierarchical and egalitarian social ideals; and tensions between the quest for new approaches and the claim for authority raised by defenders of exegetical traditions. It also aids to compare between traditional and contemporary exegetes and their way of *Tafsīr* and readings of the Qur'an. It also helps to examine the modern approach to the interpretation of the Qur'anic passages pertaining to Jews and Christians in light of modern circumstances; and to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. For instance, contemporary readings of the Qur'an often advocate the use of reason, rather than the authority of existing interpretations, to arrive at the correct understanding of the Qur'an. Modern exegetes typically aim at reading the Qur'an in its historical context and the objectives of the *Sharī'ah* (*maqāṣid*), rather than literal application.

It also discusses the various approaches employed by each exegete and involves detailed focus on the perspectives of contemporary exegetical works that have not being studied before, this a unique and fresh approach, in comparison to previous (pre-modern) interpretations and studies concerning this topic.

The discourse analysis method employed in this thesis assists in determining in what ways the Qur'an classified the discourse on Jews and Christians and aids in explaining the portrayal of the Qur'anic discourse in the three selected exegeses. This portrayal can be generally described as context -dependant and used a tone that can be described as neutral; as it criticises those who deserve criticism and praises those who are worthy of praise. This criticism is based on justification and reasons for the

three types of discourse: praise, criticism, and polemic. It also aids in finding out the guidelines for the nature of relationships between Jews, Christians, Muslims, and people of other faiths in order to create a stable world for all, in accordance with God's will. Through these classifications one can then avoid the one sided arguments witnessed in polemics and debate claiming that the Qur'an is either all positive or all negative.

This approach requires the researcher to refer to the sources that deal with the development and history of Qur'anic exegesis, as well as to the problems arising for both Muslim and non-Muslim Western scholars when approaching exegetical analysis. It also requires the researcher to identify the identity of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* and the definition of the Jews and Christians mentioned in the Qur'an

I believe this methodology is appropriate as it analytically investigates the interpretation of the Qur'anic texts on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* and aims to classify and categorise the types of discourse on the People of the Book in the classical and contemporary exegeses. Moreover, it examines the extent to which effort of the contemporary exegetes introduce a new method of exegeses that differs from the method of the classical exegetes. It also opens the door for the forthcoming researchers who might discover more categories for studying the Qur'anic discourse on the People of the Book, and more reasons why this discourse is fluctuating, sometimes negative, sometimes positive and sometimes polemical.

Structure

The thesis consists of an introduction, three parts, and a conclusion; each part is subdivided into chapters and sections. The first part contains two chapters; the first chapter will discuss the explicit Qur'anic discourse about Jews and analyses the passages that deal with them in the classical exegesis of Al-Ṭabarī. The passages on the People of the Book and their meaning are investigated, and their context and the occasions of revelation are discussed. The Makkan and Madinan Qur'an is also investigated in order to show the change in discourse between the two periods. The second chapter covers the implicit discourse about Jews through the frequent mention of their sacred symbols and revered figures, i.e. the Torah, Moses, synagogues, and rabbis.

The second part consists of chapters three and four, which cover the Qur'anic discourse on Christians in the exegesis of Al-Ṭabarī, and their negative and positive portrayal in the Qur'an in its Makkan and Madinan passages. Chapter three will discuss the explicit discourse. Chapter four will investigate the implicit discourse on Christians, which will necessitate reflection on the Qur'anic passages related to the Gospel, Mary the mother of Jesus, Jesus (pbuh), churches, and priests.

The third part will discuss and investigate in detail the Qur'anic discourse on the People of the Book in the exegeses of two contemporary scholars, namely, Ibn 'Āshūr, and Sha'rāwī. This part contains the remaining three chapters which demonstrate the Qur'anic discourse on the People of the Book in these two contemporary exegeses and to what extent each exegete contextualised the texts related to the People of the Book. Chapter seven, the last chapter, will discuss the third type of Qur'anic discourse, namely, the polemical discourse on the People of the Book in the three classical and contemporary exegeses of Al-Ṭabarī and contemporary exegeses of Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī.

PART ONE

JEWS IN THE CLASSICAL EXEGESIS OF AL-ṬABARĪ

Introduction

The Qur'anic discourse on Jews and the Children of Israel occurs in nearly fifty Madinan and Makkan *Sūrahs*.⁹⁸ It is clear that the Madinan *Sūrahs* cover the narrative of the Children of Israel more comprehensively in comparison to the Makkan ones. The reason for this is perhaps due to the community of Jewish people who settled in Madinah during that era and the events which occurred between them and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In his commentary of the passages related to the Jews, Al-Ṭabarī alludes to Ibn Ishāq's narrations, who introduced a detailed explanation about the Jews of Madinah in his wellknown work *Biography of Prophet Muhammad*. Although the criticism to Ibn Ishāq narrations and its authenticity, Al-Ṭabarī employed his narrations and references to interpret the passages related to the Jews.⁹⁹

Therefore, the main *Sūrahs* which review discourse on the Children of Israel were revealed in Madinah. These include: *Al-Baqarah* 2, *Āl 'Imrān* 3, *Al-Mā'idah* 5, *Al-Mujādilah* 58, *Al-Ḥashr* 59, *Al-Ṣaf* 61, and *Al-Jumu'ah* 62. The Makkan Qur'anic discourse on them can also be found in the following *Sūrahs*: *Al-A'rāf*, *Yūnus*, *Al-Isrā'*, *Ṭā-Hā*, *Al-Shu'arā'*, *Al-Qaṣaṣ*, *Ghāfir*, and *Al-Dukhān*.¹⁰⁰ Al-Ṭabarī alludes to Ibn Ishāq's reference to the three major Jewish tribes i.e. *Banū Quraizah*, *Banū Qainuqā'*, and *Banū al-Naḍīr*, all of which adopted an unfriendly attitude towards Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Madinah.¹⁰¹ For example in his commentary of *Sūrah Al-Ḥashr* 59, Al-Ṭabarī mentions the occasion of revelation of some passages in this *Sūrah* and refers to the reasons for the negative attitude and clash between Prophet Muhammad and Jews in Madinah was because of their disobedience to God and His Messenger and breaking the covenant.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Darawza, M. 'Azza, *Al-Yahūd fī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, no date) p. 4.

⁹⁹ Al-Baghdadī, Al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdad*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, 2002) vol.1, p. 226

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.12

¹⁰¹ MS: Ibn Ishāq, Muhammad, *Al-Sīra Al-Nabawīyyah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004) vol. 2, pp. 310-311

¹⁰² Darawza, M. 'Azza, *Al-Yahūd fī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, no date) p. 4.

¹⁰² MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarir, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000) vol. 23, pp. 229-269

The discourse of the Makkan *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an is less harsh, in terms of condemnation and criticism, than those of Madinah.¹⁰³ Although the Qur'an contains detailed discourse on Jews and the Children of Israel, it does not deal directly with their history or the lives of their figures. This is because the Qur'an usually deals with events as opposed to individual persons, serving the context and achieving the goal of the message. However, *Sūrah Yūsuf* is the only complete Makkan *Sūrah* which deals in detail with the story of the family of Jacob (pbuh). Similarly, *Sūrah Al-A'raf* gives more detailed information on the story of the Children of Israel and Moses (pbuh), after the era of *Yūsuf* (pbuh). There are other Makkan *Sūrahs* which cover some of their narratives in detail, such as *Sūrah Al-Shu'arā'* (26), *Al-Naml* (27), *Al-Qaṣaṣ* (28), *Al-Zukhruf* (43) and *Al-Nāzi'āt* (79).¹⁰⁴ In his book, *'Banī Isrā'īl fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah*, Sheikh Ṭanṭāwī (d. 2010) views that the history of the Jews began with Jacob and his twelve children, although they can be traced back to their grandfather Abraham (pbuh).¹⁰⁵ He maintains that *Sūrah Yūsuf* is the first chapter which relates the beginning of the Jews themselves, and reviews in detail the story of the Children of Jacob. Other writers such as, Aḥmad Shalabī (d. 2000) in his book entitled *Al-Yahūdiyya* maintains that the actual history of the Jews starts with the era of Moses.¹⁰⁶ Following the era of Jacob and his offspring, the Qur'an also covers the story of the Children of Israel from Moses until Jesus, peace be upon them all. Although there is no *Sūrah* with the actual name of Moses, his narrative is most mentioned throughout the *Sūrahs* in the Qur'an. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Although exegetes have debated over the history of the Jews, Al-Ṭabarī's exegetical discourse on them is significantly fluctuating. Al-Ṭabarī with his distinguished methodology explained the passages that relate to the Children of Isrā'īl and discusses how God perceives their faith and action, which alternates between praise and condemnation. To make these passages clear, he relied on the sayings of other early exegetes and interpretations of other scholars, and employed the historical context and occasions of revelation. Some passages describe a group of them as People of the Book (in this case the Torah) who believe in God, the Last Day, and the scriptures,

¹⁰³ Darawza, M. 'Azza, *Al-Yahūd fī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, no date) p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Rubin, Uri. 'Children of Israel.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*. University of Exeter. 25 September 2012 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaediaof-the-Quran/children-of-israel-COM_00032

¹⁰⁵ Ṭanṭāwī, M. Sayyid, *Banū Isrā'īl fī al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Shurūq, 1997) p. 12

¹⁰⁶ Shalabī, Ahmad, *Al-Yahūdiyya*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Masriyyah, 8th edition, 1988) p. 130

and who do good deeds (Q 3:113-115, 3:199, 4:162).¹⁰⁷ Al-Ṭabarī demonstrated that these passages refer to a group of Jews who believed in God, the Last Day, enjoin good, and forbid evil. Such groups are not equal to those Jews who disbelieve in God and disobey the Torah.¹⁰⁸ He discussed the interpretations of various exegetes and selected Ibn Ishāq's narration about the occasion of revelation of these passages (i.e. 3:113-115) which states a group of Jews who embraced Islam and mentions some names such as Ibn Salam and Tha'labah.¹⁰⁹ These also remind them that they received a divine Book, and ought to believe in the new message and the new Messenger whose name is mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel (Q 28:52-54). Other passages criticise other members of the same groups for various reasons, such as: their disbelief in God's signs and verses, the new message (i.e. Islam) and the Messenger (i.e. Muhammad) after they knew him, and for their disobedience to God (Q 3:98-99).¹¹⁰ These texts and others also describe them with various characteristics such as religious extremism and disobedience to the Torah.

Some specific *Sūrahs* such as *Āl 'Imrān*, *Al-Nisā*, and *Al-Mā'idah* reflect this fluctuating attitude when the bad deeds of the Jews are highlighted (see Q 5:59, 62, 66, 80). Other *Sūrahs* such as *Al-Qaṣaṣ* 52-54, *Al-Baqarah* 121, *Al-A'rāf* 159, and *Al-Isrā'* 107-109, refer to a similar sense of disapproval and confirm similar characteristics in the followers of the Book. However, these passages do not describe them all; they exclude the good among them (Q 2:83) and those who do good deeds (Q 3:113-115, 3:199, 4:162). It is worthy to note that the Qur'an generally shows that the People of the Book (Children of Isrā'īl) are not the same; some of them are good while others are not. This will be analysed later under the subtitle 'They Are Not All the Same' (Q 3:113-115, 3:199, 4:162).

It is clear upon inspection that the Qur'anic discourse towards the Jews is clear and context-dependant, and introduces justification and reasons for all types of discourses, whether negative, positive, or polemical. The discourse praises those who do good, follow God's commandments, and do not break the law of the Torah or the covenant

¹⁰⁷ '...But those of them who are well grounded in knowledge and have faith do believe in what has been revealed to you (Prophet Muhammad), and in what was revealed before you....' (Q 4:162)

¹⁰⁸ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarir, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.7, pp. 117-118

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp.122-129

¹¹⁰ Ibid., vol.6, pp. 52-53

of God, and criticises those who break and disobey the commandments of God. The Qur'anic attitude does not consider all groups of Jews equally, as it does not consider all Christians or all Muslims equally. In these texts and similar ones, the Qur'an distinguishes between Jews who have recognised and believed in a divine Book and other communities who have no such recognition, such as idolaters, pagans, atheists, and polytheists. It also distinguishes between those who have knowledge and belief and those who are ignorant and disbelieve.¹¹¹

The reason for choosing Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis is that his methodology is widely accepted by the majority of Muslims despite some criticism launched against him. Moreover, Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis is known with comprehensiveness and clarity, and important example of '*al-Tafsīr bil-ma'thūr*'.¹¹²

This part contains two chapters: the explicit and the implicit discourse of the Qur'an on the Children of Israel in Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis. It investigates to what extent does Al-Ṭabarī understand and contextualise the passages relating to the People of the Book? Does Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis reflect and demonstrate either a positive or negative discourse on the Jews? It will demonstrate Al-Ṭabarī's methodology in interpreting the passages and the tools he used to justify his commentary and interpretation such as relying on *ḥadīths* and traditions, and referring to many of his contemporary exegetes. Following the mention of these concepts, he would then express his own opinions when interpreting passages related to the Jews. It also looks at how he reviewed the Qur'anic discourse on their characteristics, actions, mistakes, the favours they were given, the Torah, Moses, their prophets, synagogues, and rabbis. The investigation and analysis will elaborate on the fluctuating tone and attitude of the Makkan and Madinan revelations within Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis, as well as discuss the historical context or occasions of revelation of these passages. This will help to answer the basic question posed in this research.

¹¹¹ Ibid., vol. 9, pp. 392-394.

¹¹² McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 43

1. CHAPTER ONE

The Explicit Discourse of the Qur'an on Jews

1.1. Al-Ṭabarī: Life and Methodology

Abū Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī was born in Northern Persia in 224 AH, or 839 CE. His exegesis is considered the oldest and best-known Sunni *Tafsīr* that was authored between 283 AH (896 CE) and 290 AH (903 CE). He travelled to numerous places in search of knowledge such as Rayy, Baṣra, Kūfah, Cairo, and Syria. Finally, he settled in Baghdad where he spent the rest of his life. Al-Ṭabarī became an expert scholar of *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* (especially the Shāfi'ī school of jurisprudence), Qur'anic interpretation, and history. His exegesis is ranked as the most significant example of '*al-Tafsīr bil-ma'thūr*' (exegesis using traditions and narrations) due to its usage of a tremendous number of exegetical *ḥadīths*. Gilliot (b.1940 CE) describes Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis as the model for classical Qur'anic commentary, and no original commentary was composed after him.

Al-Ṭabarī's methodology was to cite the passage or passages of the Qur'an, divide them into words or grammatical units, then he referenced a list of *ḥadīths* and traditions that refer to the passage in discussion, including the opinions of other scholars. He follows by mentioning his own opinion, stating the most correct interpretation based on his analysis. In addition to narrations, Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis refers to the variant modes of reading (*qirā'āt*) and contains philological and grammatical material, where he especially relies on the Baṣran and Kūfan schools of grammar. The major aspect of Al-Ṭabarī's methodology in his exegesis is the use of *Ijtihād* (independent reasoning).¹¹³ Through his exegetical works, it is quite clear that Al-Ṭabarī's tafsīr and writings comprise of the most singular collection of citations from earlier authorities, such as the works of Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Mas'ūd, Ubay Ibn Ka'b, and Ibn Ishāq.¹¹⁴ Moreover, he referred to occasions of revelation of these passages and this limited the exegesis to the earlier period of Islam and the early relationship between the Jews

¹¹³ Gilliot, Claude. 'Exegesis of the Qur'an: Classical and Medieval.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*. General Editor: Brill Online, University of Exeter. 01 December 2014 <http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com/lib-exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/exegesis-of-the-qur-a-n-classical-and-medieval-EQCOM_00058>

¹¹⁴ See *Al-Tafsīr wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*, by Al-Dhahabī, M. Husain, (Cairo: Dar Ihya' Al-Turath, , 1976), p. 222

and Muhammad (pbuh). The great merits of his exegesis *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an* 'The Comprehensive Clarification of the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qur'an' are that it forms the early works of Islamic knowledge and preserves the greatest array of narrations and citations for the original lost sources. It also provides the modern generation and studies with detailed knowledge about the early stages and history of Islam.¹¹⁵

Although Al-Ṭabarī relied much on transmission and authentic narrations in his commentary, he referred to quotations from Judeo-Christian sources. Mahmud Shakir (d. 1997 CE) stated that Al-Ṭabarī alludes to such references and quotations in order to demonstrate the context of phrases and words, similar to referring to classical Arabic poetry, not as an authentic proof for the interpretation.¹¹⁶ He provided an example of Al-Ṭabarī's commentary on passage (Q 2:243), in which he states that Al-Ṭabarī quoted from Judeo-Christian sources to explain the term '*ulūf*', which can be derived from '*alf*', meaning 'they were thousands'; or '*īlāf al-qulūb*', 'bringing their hearts together'.¹¹⁷ According to Shakir, Al-Ṭabarī's reference to quotations from Israelite sources is to explain the meaning of the words and demonstrate the historical context and occasion of revelation.¹¹⁸ Regardless, it can be noted that Al-Ṭabarī quoted other narrations from Israelite sources on various occasions. He used this methodology to interpret the texts relating to the People of the Book.

1.2. Qur'anic Terms for the Jews

Al-Ṭabarī explained the various terms and expressions that the Qur'anic discourse employs to refer to the Jewish people. These terms and names include: *Banī Isrā'īl* (the Children of Israel), *Al-Yahūd* (the Jews), *Ahl Al-Kitāb* (People of the Book), and *hādū* (those who became Jews). He also alludes to the interpretations and narrations of other exegetes to make these names and terms clear. There are modern terms which refer to them but are not used in the Qur'an such as: '*Ibrānī* (Hebrew), and

¹¹⁵ Bosworth, C.E., "*al-Ṭabarī*", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 19 February 2019 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1133>

¹¹⁶ Al-Hawshan, Yusuf, *Al-Athār Al-Wāriḍāh 'an Al-Salaf fī Al-Yahūd fī Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī*, (Riyadh: Ministry of Awqaf, 2003, pp. 34-35

¹¹⁷ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 5, p. 276

¹¹⁸ Al-Hawshan, Yusuf, *Al-Athār Al-Wāriḍāh 'an Al-Salaf fī Al-Yahūd fī Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī*, (Riyadh: Ministry of Awqaf, 2003, pp. 34-35

Suhyūnī (Zionist).¹¹⁹ The term *Banī Isrāʾīl* is mentioned thirty-three times in both Makkan and Madinan Qurʾanic passages, mainly in *Sūrah al-Baqarah* and *al-Māʾidah*. It does not refer to the Children of Israel at the time of Moses only, but there are other passages and references in the Qurʾan referring to other phases of their history such as the narrative of Talut (Saul) (Q 2:246-252), the destruction of the Temple (Q 17:2-8), and the emergence of ʿIsa (Q 61:6). There are passages that demonstrate this term interchangeably with the term *ʿAhl Al-Kitāb*. The term also appeared in the Hebrew Bible to refer to the Israelite nation which returned to Jacob, whose name was altered to Israel (Gen 32:29). The New Testament used this name to refer to the Jewish community (Acts 1:6, 2:22, 4:8).¹²⁰ From this explanation, it can be deduced that term can be extended through their descendants to the contemporary Jews and following generations from the Jews and Christians.

Christians can be included under this term as Jesus was the last messenger to the Children of Israel. According to the majority of Muslim exegetes including Al-Ṭabarī, the word 'Israel' refers to Jacob and 'Children' refers to his offspring, twelve Children who are collectively called *Asbāṭ*. God caused prophethood to be inherited within members of the progeny of Jacob until the final prophet sent to the Israelites—Jesus (pbuh). In the New Testament, the word 'Israel' is used as a name for the Jewish people (Acts 1:6, 2:22, 3:12). In the Hebrew Bible, this word refers to a holy community chosen by God to be His special people and higher in rank above all other nations (Deut. 7:6).¹²¹ The term 'Israel' is mentioned individually twice in the Qurʾan: *Sūrah Āl ʿImrān* (Q 3:93) and *Sūrah Maryam* (Q 19:58); both referring to Jacob, according to Al-Ṭabarī.¹²² Other exegetes such as Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935 CE) views the term 'Israel' as referring to the people of Israel themselves as opposed to Jacob (pbuh); adopting his teacher's view.

The other significant term is *Al-Yahūd* (the Jews), which is repeated around fifteen times in the Qurʾan, and mainly used in its Madinan passages. There is no mention of the word *Yahūd* in the Makkan period; only the term *Banī Isrāʾīl* is used because there

¹¹⁹ Mahran, M. Bayyūmī, *Banū Isrāʾīl*, (Alexandria: Dar al-Maʾrifah, 1999) part 1, pp. 35-36

¹²⁰ Rubin, Uri, "Children of Israel", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan*, Consulted online on 24 February 2019 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00032>

¹²¹ Goitein, S.D. 'Banū Isrāʾīl. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brill Online, University of Exeter. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/banu-israil-SIM_1196

¹²² MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl ayil-Qurʾan*, (Damascus: Muʾasasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 6, p. 9

were no Jewish community in Makkah in this period. The term *Yahūd* is commonly employed on the negative side of discourse, while the term *Banī Isrāʾīl* is employed in both negative and positive contexts.¹²³ The term *hādū* (those who became Jews) is mentioned ten times in the Madinah period of revelation. The Qurʾan (Q 2:140) confirms that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were not Jews or Christians. The first Jew was Judah, the son of Jacob, and this Judah was the Father of the tribe of Judah from whom sprang the Jews. Nor was Abraham an Israelite. Jacob, his grandson, was called *Isrāʾīl* and the twelve tribes descending from his twelve sons came to be called *Banī Isrāʾīl*. The Jews—descendants of the tribe of Judah are only one tribe of *Banī Isrāʾīl*.¹²⁴

The other term is *Ahl Al-Kitāb* which is mentioned more than twenty times in the Qurʾan; and refers mainly to Jews and Christians together; and, sometimes, to Jews only or Christians only, depending on the context. For example, in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, God says, *‘Even after the truth has become clear to them, many of the People of the Book wish they could turn you back to disbelief after you have believed...’* (Q 2:109). Al-Ṭabarī, in his commentary of this passage maintains that it refers to the Jews; however, he stated the interpretation of other exegetes such as Al-Zuhārī, Ibn ʿAbbās, and Qatādah who mentioned that the passage refers to Kaʿb Al-Ashraf, the Jewish character who was an enemy to Muhammad (pbuh) and his companions.¹²⁵ Having said that, *Ahl Al-Kitāb* mainly refers to both Jews and Christians on most occasions. For instance, in *Sūrah Āl ʿImrān*: Say, *‘People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all...’* (Q 3:64). Al-Ṭabarī maintains that the People of the Book refer, in this context, to both Jews and Christians.¹²⁶ Therefore, it can be concluded that general usage of the term does not determine only one group, i.e. Jews, but includes the Christians. However, the precise group being addressed can be understood only in its context. In *ḥadīth* (i.e. statements and traditions of Prophet Muhammad), *Banī Isrāʾīl* denotes to the Jews and Christians and is thus synonymous

¹²³ ‘*Yahūd*’ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Brillonline, 2012. Brill Online, University of Exeter. 26 September 2012 <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/yahud-COM_1354

¹²⁴ Bowman, John. “*Banū Isrāʾīl in the Qurʾan*.” *Islamic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1963, pp. 447–455. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20832712.

¹²⁵ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl ayil-Qurʾan*, (Damascus: Muʾasasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 2, p. 498

¹²⁶ Ibid, vol. 6, p. 483

with *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, similar to the Qur'an. In a *ḥadīth*, Prophet Muhammad said, '*Haddithū 'an Banī Isrā'īl wa lā ḥaraj.*' Meaning, '(There is) no sin (upon you) if you narrate from (the literature of) the Children of Israel.'¹²⁷ From Al-Tabari's exegesis it is clear that the expressions *Ahl Al-Kitāb* and *alladhīna ūtū al-Kitāb* were seen to refer only to the Jews and Christians, the two serving as synonyms (Q 5:5) and (Q 28:52). But within this broad definition, any reference could be attributed to both Jews and Christians, just one of the groups, or even particular tribes or named individuals from one or both.¹²⁸ There are other terms which are employed for all people of faith; Jews, Christians, even Muslims, or others such as *Al-Mushrikīn* (idolaters)¹²⁹, *Ẓālimūn* (wrongdoers)¹³⁰, *Kāfirūn* (rejecters)¹³¹, *Fasiqūn* (transgressors), and *Mu'tadūn* (aggressors).¹³² These terms denote the action and attitude of the individual, whether they have faith or not; and the context determines which group the Qur'an meant.

1.3. The Jews in Al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*

In Al-Ṭabarī's commentary, it can be noted that he gives a brief explanation to the three explicit terms (*Banī Isrā'īl* (the Children of Israel), *Al-Yahūd* (the Jews), *Ahl Al-Kitāb* (People of the Book)). It seems that the the name Jews is a less comprehensive term than the term Children of Israel and refers to those who follow Moses and believe in the Torah.¹³³ This name and its derivatives appear in the Madinan Sūrahs around 15 times, compared with the term *Banī Isrā'īl*, which appears 43 times in the entire Qur'an.¹³⁴ Although the word Jews—mainly mentioned in Madinan passages—refers to portraying the events and relationship between Muhammad and Jews of Madinah,

¹²⁷ Rubin, Uri. 'Children of Israel.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*. 27 September 2012 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/children-of-israel-COM_00032

¹²⁸ Berg, Herbert. "Ṭabarī's Exegesis of the Qur'ānic Term Al-Kitāb." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 63, no. 4, 1995, pp. 761–774. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1465467.

¹²⁹ The word *Al-Mushrikīn*, which is the opposite of the word monotheists, is repeated several times in the Qur'an to refer to anyone, Muslims or non-Muslims, who associate partners with God in worship or belief, or do not believe in God, or do unjust actions.

¹³⁰ The term *Ẓālimūn* (wrongdoers) is one of the most repeated expressions in the Qur'an.

¹³¹ The term *Kāfirūn* is also used generally to refer to any rejecter of God or the message of Islam. It also refers to Jews or Christians when they reject the message of Islam.

¹³² *Mu'jam Alfāz al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Majma' Allughā al-Arabia, 1989) pp. 536-537

¹³³ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 6, p. 500

¹³⁴ Stillman, N.A., "Yahūd", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 24 February 2019 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1354>

it the religious ruling and intended meaning that can extend to include the Jews and their descendants at any time and place.

The term Children of Israel in most of the Qur'anic passages is also employed to refer to the people of Moses ((Q 2:54, 60, 67; 7:128, 142, 155). However, the term is not confined to Moses's own time, but encompasses all those ensuing generations amongst whom the biblical prophets were active. Accordingly, the Qur'ān (Q 2:246) describes the Children of Israel as the contemporaries of Saul (Ṭālūt), David (Dawud) (Q 5:78), and Jesus (Q 5:72, 78, 110; 43:59; 61:6, 14). Muḥammad's own Jewish contemporaries are also already described in the Makkan Qur'an (Q 17:101; 26:197; 46:10) as the Children of Israel, assuring them that the Qur'ān instructs them about themselves (Q 27:76). The Children of Israel in the Madinan Qur'an is similar to the term *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, which is often referring to the Jews and Christians in Muhammad's era (Q:153).¹³⁵

In his commentary on the Qur'anic discourse and texts relating to the Jews, Al-Ṭabarī relied on the traditions and narrations of the companions' exegetes, their followers, and the early exegetes, especially Ibn Ishāq and Ibn 'Abbās. Al-Ṭabarī explained his viewpoint on the passages according to context and meaning, namely, he explained the passages which criticise the Jews and refers to the reasons and the occasion of revelation to justify why they were criticised in this context, then refers to the traditions and *ḥadīths* which confirm the same meaning. Similarly, he explained his viewpoint on the positive passages according to the context, intended meaning, and occasions of revelation. He employed this methodology in the three types of Qur'anic discourse on Jews; negative, positive and polemical. For instance, in his commentary on Q 59:2, Al-Ṭabarī alludes to various narrations and other exegetes commentaries on the passage. One of them is Ibn Ishaq's narration on the occasion of revelation for the passage in which he mentioned that a group of people promised to support the Jewish tribe of *Banū Al-Naḍīr* against Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), but they broke their promise.¹³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī refers to other similar views on this passage which refers to the banishment of this tribe from Madinah. The reason for this negative discourse in this

¹³⁵ Rubin, Uri, "Children of Israel", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 25 February 2019 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24398>

¹³⁶ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 23, pp. 262-265

context returns to violations of the agreement with Muhammad. Al-Ṭabarī as usual mentioned his own interpretation; then referred to the similar interpretation of other exegetes. It can be noted that in Al-Ṭabarī's commentary he stated that the passage meant a group of the Jews who violated the agreement and not all of them; that is why, the passage mentions the proposition '*min*' which means some. The second notes that the passage called the Jews '*Ahl Al-Kitāb*', not *Banū Al-Naḍīr* tribe or any other group, which means that the context plays important role to define the intended group or people¹³⁷

Similarly, in his commentary on this passage which shows negative discourse in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* '*The Jews and the Christians will never be pleased with you unless you follow their ways...*' (Q 2:120) Al-Ṭabarī does not refer to any historical contexts or occasions of revelation for this text, rather he comments that the Jews and Christians would not be pleased with Muhammad's message until he agrees with or accepts their religion and follows their way. Al-Ṭabarī adds that there is no way that Muhammad (pbuh) followed Judaism and Christianity as they are both in disagreement and against each other. He considered this passage as a warning to Muhammad not to listen to them nor to try to please them; but be steadfast and firm because you have the truth.¹³⁸

In an example of positive discourse on Jews, Al-Ṭabarī refers in his commentary on Q 28:52-55 to several narrations and occasions of revelation about the discourse in this passage and maintains that the believers of the People of the Book will receive reward from God; and receive two rewards if they believe in the message of Muhammad (pbuh). He also maintains that the passage refers to a group of Jews who believed in Muhammad (pbuh), such as 'Abdullāh Ibn Salām and others. In a third narration, Al-Ṭabarī stated that it refers to a group of the People of the Book: Jews who believed in the Torah and the Qur'an, and Christians who believed in the Gospel and the Qur'an. Such groups will receive two rewards; one for their belief in their Book and a second for their belief in the Qur'an.¹³⁹ In similar passages (Q 2:62, 5:69, and 22:17), the Qur'an mentions God's reward for societies of other faiths, including Jews and Christians, who believed in Him and did good deeds. These passages clearly emphasised belief in God, performing good deeds, and belief in the Hereafter, without

¹³⁷ Ibid., vol. 23, p. 259

¹³⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 562

¹³⁹ Ibid., vol. 19, p. 594

explicitly including belief in Muhammad (pbuh). However, the majority of exegetes explained the intended meaning incorporates the belief in the new message, its Prophet, and the Qur'an in order to receive the reward. The negative discourse to the Children of Israel and criticism to the Jews in *Tafsīr* Al-Ṭabarī are borne out of the multiplicity of passages and chapters about them, which occupy a large portion in the Qur'an. Despite this, he has not ignored the explanation of the positive discourse about them either.

In his commentary on the two polemical passages Q 2:47, 45:16, and the claim that the Children of Israel were preferred above all others including Muhammad's nation, Al-Ṭabarī maintains that claim is incorrect, and the intended meaning in the passage is that they were the best above all others during their time, due to their belief and obedience. He views this preference is limited and conditional, and it ended when they disbelieved in the new message and disobeyed the teachings of God and Moses (pbuh).¹⁴⁰ It is similar to passage Q 3:110¹⁴¹ which described Muslims as the best nation if they believe in God, enjoin good, and forbid evil. Al-Ṭabarī maintains that the exegetes differed on the meaning of the passage and referred to many traditions, occasions of revelation, and sayings of other exegetes about the meanings. For instance, he states that the companions of Muhammad (pbuh) are the best. Others such as Ibn 'Abbās declare that it refers specifically to the companions who migrated with Muhammad to Madinah; and others said it refers to all of Muhammad's companions and his followers.¹⁴² Those who interpreted it as a reference to Muslims in general maintain that it is conditional, namely if they do not believe in God; command what is good, and forbid evil; they are not the best.¹⁴³ Al-Ṭabarī confirms this meaning for both passages; the preference for any nation, whether Jews or Muslims, lies in belief of the One God, obedience to Him, and performing good deeds and avoiding evil ones. He concludes, in the context of this argument, that the preference for the Children of Israel above the world was only during the era of Moses (pbuh). In relation to this topic, Yusuf Al-Hawshan authored a research thesis, under the heading *Al-*

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., vol.1, pp. 169-70

¹⁴¹ '(Believers), you are the best community singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God. If the People of the Book had also believed, it would have been better for them.' (Q 3:110)

¹⁴² MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.7, pp. 100-105

¹⁴³ Ibid., vol.1, pp. 24-25

Āthār Al-Wāriḍāh ‘an Al-Salaf fī Al-Yahūd fī Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī, investigating the discourse and narrations on the Jews mentioned in Al-Ṭabarī’s exegesis. Al-Hawshan made a survey on the narrations and traditions mentioned about the Jews in Al-Ṭabarī’s *Tafsīr*. He focused on the negative discourse in his exegesis and ignored the positive discourse.¹⁴⁴

Al-Ṭabarī highlights that there are comparisons to be made between some groups of the Jews who have been obedient to the teachings of God, doing good, following the rules of the Torah, acknowledging the new message of Islam, and other groups who have been disobedient to God, doing evil, and showing hostility towards the message of Islam. He clarified that the reasons for this negative discourse about the Jews can be attributed to their attitude toward the teachings of God, Moses, and the Torah. Moreover, the bad characteristics they developed caused harm to those who disagree with their belief, and consequently, lead to enmity. These characteristics included taking wealth unlawfully, killing, stealing, yearning for the worldly life, and hating the Hereafter. He maintains that because of this attitude and characteristics, they are worthy of criticism and bad destiny. Al-Ṭabarī presents a fluctuating interpretation to the verses regarding *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, portraying them as being made up of different groups. Each group is portrayed according to their beliefs and actions. Throughout the ages, exegetes have dealt with these passages in various ways. During the classical period, exegetes refrained from excessive categorisations and limited references to specific groups of Jews or Christians. On the other hand, contemporary exegetes have opened the door for more subtle and nuanced meanings with regards to *Ahl Al-Kitāb* passages to include the position of the contemporary People of the Book.

1.4 The Tone of the Makkan *Sūrahs* towards the Jews

It can be noted that the Qur’an changes in tone towards the Jews from one phase to another, and addresses them with a varied tone in the two periods: Makkan and Madinan. The Makkan period, which is before Muhammad’s migration to Madinah, focuses more on their narrative, the message of Moses (pbuh), the prophets sent to the Children of Israel,¹⁴⁵ and their rebellious stance against Moses and his

¹⁴⁴ Al-Hawshan, Yusuf, *Al-Athār Al-Wāriḍāh ‘an Al-Salaf fī Al-Yahūd fī Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī*, (Riyadh: Ministry of Awqaf, 2003), pp. 34-35

¹⁴⁵ See Q 7:137-155

teachings.¹⁴⁶ The passages of the Makkan period are aimed at achieving two purposes. The first of those is to demonstrate that the Prophet Muhammad's message is not innovated, but a message for guidance, like the previous messages of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, peace be upon them all.¹⁴⁷ The second purpose is to elaborate on the reaction of disbelief in the Prophet Muhammad's message, and how it is similar to the same reaction of previous nations with their prophets. Therefore, there are lessons for the pagans of Makkah and disbelievers in general. An example can be found from verses 15 to 19 of *Sūrah Al-Muzzammil* and 6 to 14 of *Sūrah Al-Fajr*, which contain messages of warning and lessons to consider from the previous nations. It is also a confirmation for all nations that the principle of this message is similar to those of their scriptures: '*All this is in the earlier scriptures, the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.*' (Q 87:18-19).¹⁴⁸

When Islam spread, the tone of the Makkan Qur'an directed its focus to monotheism, revelation, and the truthfulness of Prophet Muhammad's message (Q 81:15-29). This phase also refers briefly to stories of the Children of Israel's messengers in numerous Makkan *Sūrahs*, such as *Ṣād* (38), *Yā-sīn* (36), *Maryam* (19), *Ṭā-Hā* (20), and *Al-Shu'arā'* (26). This phase can be called *Targhīb* and *Tarhīb* (Enticement and Threat). The other phase of the Makkan Qur'an towards the Jews is the phase of dialogue and argumentation. This is highlighted in the Makkan *Sūrahs* or Makkan passages in the Madinah *Sūrahs*: *Al-Furqān*:7-11, *Al-Isrā'*:94-96, and *Ibrāhīm*:4-8. These *Sūrahs* refer to the requests made by the People of the Book to their prophets; claims and allegations as in *Al-Hijr* (Q 15:6-15), *Saba'* (Q 34:43-50), and *Hūd* (Q 11:120).¹⁴⁹ Generally, the attitude of the Qur'an discourse towards the Jews during the Makkan period of revelation was less negative. In fact, some passages praised them and their actions as in *Al-Sajdah* (Q 32:23-25), *Al-Isrā'* (Q 17:107-108), and *Al-Qaṣaṣ* (Q 28:52-53).¹⁵⁰ In *Sūrah Al-A'raf* (Q 7:159), which is a Makkan *Sūrah*, the Qur'an reads about the Jews, '*There is a group among the people of Moses who guide with truth, and who act justly according to it*'. This passage clearly praises a group of the Jews during the

¹⁴⁶ Darawza, M. 'Azza, *Al-Yahūd fī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, no date) pp. 3-4

¹⁴⁷ Musallam, Mustafa, *Ma'ālim Qur'aniyyah fī aṣ-Ṣirā' ma'a al-Yahūd*, (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1999) p. 29

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 32-33

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 36-37

¹⁵⁰ Darawza, M. 'Azza, *Al-Yahūd fī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, no date) p. 5

era of Moses (pbuh).¹⁵¹ The reason for this attitude is probably due to the small number of Jews living in Makkah who did not oppose nor display hostility towards the message of Muhammad (pbuh).¹⁵² Moreover, the revelation which focused more on monotheism, belief in the scriptures (i.e. the Torah), and messengers of the Children of Israel, aim at inclining their hearts to the new religion as it consists of the same religious principles.¹⁵³

Similarly, M. A. Drawzah (d. 1984 CE) divides the Qur'anic discourse on Jews into two phases. First, the phase of the Makkan Qur'an, before Prophet Muhammad's migration, as in *Sūrah Yūsuf*, *Al-A'raf*, *Al-Qaṣaṣ*, *Ibrāhīm*, *Yūnus*, *Al-Shu'arā'*, and *Ṭā-Hā*.¹⁵⁴ However, there are passages which are repeated in both phases, for example, the Makkan *Sūrah Al-A'raf* (Q 7:141), and Madinan *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* (Q 2:49), and the Makkan *Sūrah Ibrāhīm* (Q 14:6). The reason for this repetition is potentially to link and compare the stances of the Jews before and after Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The second phase is the Madinan passages of the Qur'an, which cover the discourse on the Jews in Madinah, portraying the most hostility and conflict on behalf of the Jews towards Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).¹⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī interpreted the passages of the two phases relying on the occasions of revelation for these texts and the interpretation of other scholars and exegetes to these texts, such as Ibn 'Abbās, Qatādah, Al-Suddī, Masrūq, 'Ikrimah, Mujāhid, Ibn Ishāq and others. He refers to the fluctuating attitude by interpreting the passages having a positive attitude and confirm that there is a group of Jews who were following guidance and who were on the right path (Q 7:59).¹⁵⁶

1.5 The Tone of the Madinan *Sūrahs* towards the Jews

The tone of Madinan passages toward the Jews is harsher than those in the Makkan ones – the latter being scarcer than the former. The longest *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an (2, 3, 4, 5, and 7) were revealed in Madinah and cover the vast majority of the Qur'anic

¹⁵¹ McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 198

¹⁵² There are a few verses that refer to a few Jewish people living in Makkah such as *Al-Shu'arā'*: 196-197 and *An-Naml*:76, *Al-A'raf*:157, and *Al-Ahqāf*: 10, which refer that some converted to Islam in Makkah

¹⁵³ Darawza, M. 'Azza, *Al-Yahūd fī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, no date) p. 9

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.10

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 11

¹⁵⁶ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 13, pp. 172-175

discourse on the Jews, putting more stress on their deeds, behaviour toward Moses, the Torah, and Muhammad's message. Tension between the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and the Jews of Madinah i.e. *Banū Al-Naḍīr*, *Banū Quraizah*, and *Banū Qainuqā'*, varied between times when they were in conflict or under treaty. Al-Ṭabarī refers to Ibn Ishāq's narrations on the historical context and the occasions of revelation of many *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an which contain references to those tribes of the Jews in Madinah. *Sūrah Al-Ḥashr* (59), for instance, is one of those *Sūrahs* which relates the relationship with one of the Jewish tribes, namely *Banū Al-Naḍīr*. Similar tensions occurred with the other Jewish tribes of Madinah i.e. *Banū Quraizah*, and *Banū Qainuqā'*, and these are narrated in the Qur'an and literature of Prophet Muhammad's biography. Ibn Ishāq mentions many theological discussions and issues that occurred between Muhammad and the Jews, some of which are referred to in the Qur'an, especially the passages which start with the phrase, 'They question you about...' (Q 2:189, 20:105, 17:85, 18:83 and so on.).¹⁵⁷

The Qur'anic discourse on the Jews changes its attitude in the Madinan period for various reasons such as violation of the agreement with Muhammad; breaking the covenant; showing hostility and plotting against him, and disbelief in his message.¹⁵⁸ Unlike Makkah, there was a large community of Jews in Madinah who enjoyed a high social, political, economic, and religious position. When the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) emigrated to Madinah and continued his mission there, the three major tribes of Jews were largely claimed to be interested in their position and status within Madinah. Therefore, they opposed Prophet Muhammad's message and showed hostility towards it.¹⁵⁹ The Qur'an maintains that they knew that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is a true Messenger sent by God, but still rejected him (Q 2:89, 3:86, 7:157).¹⁶⁰ In his commentary on this passage (Q 2:89)¹⁶¹, Al-Ṭabarī maintains that when a Scripture (i.e. the Qur'an) came to them from God confirming what the Children of Israel already had (i.e. , Torah and the Gospel) and when they were

¹⁵⁷ MS: Ibn Ishāq, Muhammad, *Al-Sīra Al-Nabawīyyah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), vol. 2, p. 384

¹⁵⁸ Musallam, Mustafa, *Ma'ālim Qur'aniyyah fī aṣ-Ṣirā' ma'a al-Yahūd*, (Damascus: dar al-Qalam, 1999) p. 55

¹⁵⁹ Darawza, M. 'Azza, *Al-Yahūd fī al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, no date) p. 9

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ 'When a Scripture came to them from God confirming what they already had, and when they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers, even when there came to them something they knew (to be true), they disbelieved in it...' (Q 2:89)

expecting the coming of the new prophet and waiting for his support against the pagans and disbelievers they, however, disbelieved in it. He adds, although the Jews knew about the coming of a new prophet i.e. Muhammad (pbuh) from their Scripture and they knew that it is true, they did not believe in his message.¹⁶² He also refers to Ibn Ishāq's narration from Ibn 'Abbās in which he stated that the Jews used to request Muhammad's support against the *Al-Aws* and *Al-Khazraj* tribes, before his prophecy; later and during his prophecy, they denied his prophecy. Al-Ṭabarī refers to other various narrations of occasions of revelation to this passage, which demonstrate similar meaning and prove his interpretation.

Al-Ṭabarī, in his commentary on passages related to *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Madinan *Sūrahs*, mentions the historical context and *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*. He refers to the Jews during the time of Moses or the Jews of Madinah during the time of Muhammad. Most of the Madinan Qur'anic discourse was revealed to criticise the deeds and behaviour of Jews towards Moses or breaking the rules of the Torah, or disobedience, or refusing to believe; or criticise the deeds of Jews during the time of Muhammad. The positive discourse in these long *Sūrahs* refers to a group of the Jews who converted to Islam or the Jews who believed and did good at the time of Muhammad without conversion.¹⁶³ Al-Ṭabarī does not make reference in his commentary that this ruling applies only to the Jews at the time of Moses or the Jews at the time of Muhammad. This means that although these various narrations are about the reasons for revelation and the historical context for these passages in Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis, it is agreed amongst Muslims scholars that the ruling applies to every Jew at any time and any where, and not only to the Jews at the time of Moses or Jews at the time of Muhammad. It is evident in Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis that the Qur'anic discourse on Jews in the Madinan Qur'an is harsher in criticism for the reasons mentioned above.

1.6 Features of Positive Discourse in the Qur'an

Despite the hostility on the part of the majority of Jews, the Qur'anic image of those among them who are sincere is taken into consideration. In some passages, they are described as true believers (Q 3:113, 2:62, 5:69, 22:17) and a divine reward is

¹⁶² MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarir, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.2, pp. 3330-336

¹⁶³ Ibid, vol. 2, pp. 135-266

promised to them as well as to the other monotheistic communities, provided that they remain monotheistic, believing in God and the Day of Judgment.¹⁶⁴ When the Qur'an invites nations through messengers and prophets to worship one God (see Q 21:25; 7:59,65,73,85), it uses the phrase '*I'budu-llāha mā lakum min ilāhin ghayruh*': 'Worship God as there is no other god to worship but Him', or phrases of similar meaning.¹⁶⁵ It also invites the Jews who lived in the Arabian Peninsula to accept Muhammad's message.

To encourage them to accept the new message, the Qur'an—on many occasions—reflects a positive attitude towards Jews and describes them as People of the Book or *Banī Isrā'īl*. This is to show that they understand the message and accept the one that was sent to them: to be upright and sincere to God. They are a peaceful people, and God is honouring and recognising them for it. In fact, it is a matter of faith, not sect or religion. The discourse is concerned with sincere correct belief and not that of status, nor religious and ethnic sects. Obviously, it does not generalise the discourse to all of them, but it precisely states the word '*minhum*' i.e. among them; and urges Muslims to address them in the best manner and argue with them in the best way (Q 29:46); while excluding the unjust and outlawed among them (Q 98:6).¹⁶⁶

Another positive feature of discourse can be clearly noted in *Sūrah Al-Mumtaḥinah* which clarifies this sense, '*God does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with anyone who has not fought you ...*' (Q 60:8). This passage demonstrates the objective relationship and fair treatment between Muslims and non-Muslims. The term '*Qist*', which means justice, and '*Birr*', which means kindness, necessitates that a Muslim should not display hostility to those who are not hostile to him, because it is neither just nor kind to treat enemies and non-enemies alike. No one has the right to adopt a stern attitude toward those who have not oppressed them.¹⁶⁷

Al-Ṭabarī stated that the scholars of Muslim exegetes differ on the intended meaning of the phrase '*al-Ladhīna lam yuqātilūkum*': 'those who do not fight you'. Some mention that the intended meaning of this phrase refers to the Muslims who did not

¹⁶⁴ Rubin, Uri. 'Jews and Judaism.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brillonline, University of Exeter. 30 April, 2015 http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/jews-and-judaism-EQCOM_00100

¹⁶⁵ Ṭanṭāwī, M. Sayyed, *Banū Isrā'īl fī al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Shurūq, 1997), p. 86

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 127

¹⁶⁷ Maudūdī, Sayyed Abu Al-A'la, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, (Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 1993) vol. iv

migrate with Muhammad to Madinah; others mention that it refers to Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr who did not show kindness to her non-Muslim mother. Al-Ṭabarī disagrees with these narrations and sayings of these scholars and mentions that the intended meaning of this passage refers not only to *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, but to every non-Muslim.¹⁶⁸ According to him, anyone who has these characteristics whether Jews, Christians, Pagans, or belongs to any other sect is intended in the passage and the ruling applies to them. This is the justice that the passage refers to in the end because kindness should be met with kindness, and peace should be met with peace.

Al-Ṭabarī also refers to other positive features and the receptive and open-minded attitude towards the Jews in various passages and referenced examples, such as in God giving permission to eat their food and marry their women (Q 5:5), to conduct commerce with them, and essentially to carry out all types of transactions, dealings, and business with them.¹⁶⁹ Al-Ṭabarī showed a tolerant attitude in his commentary on these passages and disagreed with the limited interpretation of the other exegetes such as Muqātil, Qatadah, Al-Suddi, Ibn ‘Abbās, Jarir, Mujāhid, Al-Sha’bi, and others. *Sūrah Al’Imrān* presented another positive attitude in the following passage: Say, ‘*People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all...*’ (Q 3:64). Although some scholars of exegesis view that this passage refers to the Jews of Madinah and others view that it refers to the Christians of Najran, the majority of exegetes’ view is that it refers to both Christians and Jews who associate partners with God in worship; when some of the Jews took some their Rabbis as Lords (such as ‘Uzayr is the son of God) and the Christians declared that Jesus is the son of God (Q 9:30). Al-Ṭabarī inclines more to the claim that it refers to both the Jews and the Christians; however, he refers to all other speculations and various narrations of occasions of revelation, which allude to both Jews and Christians.¹⁷⁰

Al-Ṭabarī maintains that this passage urged Muhammad (pbuh) to invite the Jews and Christians to one common word ‘*kalimatīn sawā*’. According to him, this common word is the common justice, which means common agreement to worship only One God, and not to associate any others with Him; ignore worshipping any other gods. Al-

¹⁶⁸ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl ayil-Qur’an*, (Damascus: Mu’asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 23, p. 323

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., vol. 9, pp. 281-294

¹⁷⁰ MS: Ar-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol.4, p. 246

Ṭabarī here showed balanced and reasonable interpretation, which is different from the interpretation of other exegetes who restricted their interpretation to a group of Jews only (Jews of Madinah); or a group of Christians only (i.e. Christians of Najran).¹⁷¹ Many other features of this positive attitude towards the Jews and the Children of Israel can be found in other places in the Qur'an. This type of discourse demonstrates the soft language and the balanced treatment that the Qur'anic discourse employs to incline their hearts to Muhammad's message, and emphasise the principle of one source for all religions and messages; and the fair treatment it encourages to establish a harmonious society. In these examples of positive discourse, Al-Ṭabarī explained, in his commentary, the occasions of revelation, the intended meaning, and the reasons for such types of discourse. He clarified that such discourse was aimed at encouraging the Jews to accept the new message. However, regardless of the positive means, their main purpose was not achieved, for the Jews neither accepted the message nor the messenger.

1.7 Features of Negative Discourse in the Qur'an

Features of the negative discourse on the Jews are numerous and repeated on various levels. They are evident throughout the whole Qur'an, both Makkan and Madinan, and demonstrate criticism and condemnation of the actions and behaviour of the Jews when they disobey or abandon the teachings of Torah and their prophets. Similar features of negative discourse towards Muslims are employed in the Qur'an and maintain the same attitude with the Muslims when they disobey or abandon the teachings of the Qur'an. Similar to his commentary in the positive discourse on the Jews, Al-Ṭabarī interprets the passages that contains criticism of the Jews, referring to the narrations of occasions of revelation and commentary of other exegetes, and demonstrating the reasons for this negative discourse.

This discourse is more common in the longest *Sūrahs* and Madinan Qur'an and refers to many events of the Jews, their history, and their mistakes. Examples of events include their bondage in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, their division into twelve tribes, and their entry into the Holy Land. In terms of mention of their sins and mistakes and admonishing them, this includes their rebelliousness, their claim to be the chosen

¹⁷¹ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 6, pp. 482-3.

people, their worship of the golden calf, their request to see God and their clamour for idols, their persecution of their prophets, violation of the Sabbath, alteration of the Scriptures and the distortion of their meaning. Most of these mistakes and events are mentioned in detail in *Sūrahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Mā'idah, and Al-A'raf*.¹⁷² In *Sūrah Al-Mā'idah*, many passages depict their bad deeds (Q 5:59, 62, 66, 80).¹⁷³

Al-Ṭabarī stated that these texts clearly describe a group of Jews who committed these sins and mistakes, and mentions the occasions of revelation of other exegetes and the purpose behind this criticism for each passage. This shows that Al-Ṭabarī views the criticism is directed to a specific group from among the Jews who committed that mistake or sin. It also seems that not all mistakes were committed by the same group. Furthermore, using words like '*aktharuhum*' (i.e. most of them) and '*illah qalīlan minhum*' (i.e. except a few of them) means that these passages do not describe them all; they exclude those who believe and do good (Q 2:83, 3:199, 4:162). For example, in his comments on Q 3:199, Al-Ṭabarī reviewed the narrations of various exegetes about the intended group of the Jews and the Christians whose characteristics are mentioned in the passage. He agrees with Mujāhid's interpretation that using the proposition '*min*', which means 'some' of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* i.e. some people of the Jews and some of the Christians who believe in God, believe in all revealed messages and scriptures and submission to God.¹⁷⁴

The most common passage which indicates criticism of the Jews occurs in *Sūrah Al-Mā'idah*: '*You (Prophet) are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God...*' (Q 5:82) In his commentary on this passage, Al-Ṭabarī did not provide sufficient explanation or *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* to the first part of the passage relating to the Jews, but provided plenty of interpretation and various narrations of *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* to the part relating to the Christians.¹⁷⁵ However, he again explained the reason for fluctuating discourse and the different descriptions of the Jews and for the Christians in the passages.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, he

¹⁷² Rubin, Uri. 'Jews and Judaism.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 12 August 2012 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/jews-and-judaism-COM_00100

¹⁷³ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 10, pp. 432-464.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., vol. 7, p. 499

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., vol. 10, pp. 500-505

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., vol. 10, pp. 505-506

employed the term '*nafar*' which denotes group in Arabic to show that the description of praise here refers to a group of Christians and the description of criticism refers to a group of Jews.¹⁷⁷

Again, the discourse in these Madinan Qur'an towards the Jews and the Children of Israel is fluctuating and shows clarity and balance between the Jews who believe in God, obey the teachings, and do good and the Jews who disbelieve, disobey and do evil. This fluctuating discourse between criticism and praise depends on the actions and attitude of the Jews; it praises those who believe in God, in the Last Day, do good and do not abandon the law of the Torah or the covenant with God, and condemns those who disbelieve in God, the Last Day, do evil and disobey. The discourse in this instance is not a matter of being loyal to a specific group or faith or affiliation. God makes references to sincere belief that bears sincere actions and incurs God's acceptance, and the opposite of that is insincerity and disobedience, which incurs His Wrath. Therefore, the matter is not that of religious labelling, rather it is to do with actualising the truth of one's purpose and seeking the acceptance of his Creator.

1.8 Claims of the Jews

The Jews made claims and allegations to which the Qur'an responds. Some of these claims are mentioned with other claims of the Christians.¹⁷⁸ For instance, the claim that they are the chosen people, the Children of God, and the most beloved to God (Q 5: 18). Al-Ṭabarī believes that the passage alludes to a group of the Jews and a group of the Christians who made such claims. A high status in God's sight can only be achieved by performing good deeds. He also alludes to the interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās which stated that it meant a group of the Jews; and Ibn Ishāq's narration about the *Asbāb Al-Nuzūl* for this passage in which he narrated that a group of Jews (i.e. Nu'man Ibn Ada, Bahri Ibn 'Amr, and Sha's Ibn 'Adi) refused the invitation of Muhammad (pbuh) to believe in God and the warning against disbelief. They refused the warning and responded, 'We are sons of God and His beloved.'¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., vol.10, p. 505

¹⁷⁸ Al-Khalidi, Ṣalaḥ Abdil-Fattah, *Al-Shakhsiyyah al-Yahūdiyyah min khilāl al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1998) p. 133,

¹⁷⁹ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 10, p. 150)

Another claim is recorded by the Qur'an that 'Uzayr is the son of God (Q 9:30). Al-Ṭabarī narrated various occasions of revelation for this text and numerous narrations of other scholars and their commentaries. One such narration is that 'Uzayr is the name of a person who memorised the whole Torah when the Jews had neglected and lost it. A group of common Jewish people therefore sanctified him and elevated him to that level of divinity.¹⁸⁰

Another one of their claims is that they killed Jesus, '*We killed Jesus son of Mary the Messenger of God*' (Q 4:156-158). God mocks their claims, especially in this context of denying His favours, because God will not let a people kill His messenger who came to guide them to His way with no protection, and before he performs his mission. The phrase 'Messenger of God' came here as an indication that what they said is incorrect. Afterwards, the phrase 'They never killed or crucified' is mentioned to explain that it was only the mere thought that they killed Christ that made them propagate this and declare it to the people, and they did so before they went to the idea of crucifixion. They killed someone who looked like Jesus. Therefore, God denied their claim by this text: '*They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them...*' (Q 4:157).¹⁸¹ Al-Ṭabarī reviewed several narrations in this regard and preferred the narration of Wahb Ibn Munabih in order to refute the claim of the Jews.¹⁸² He justified his choice to Wahb's narration because the disciples of Jesus witnessed the whole event from the beginning when Jesus asked them, 'Who wants to look like and be my companion in paradise. According to Al-Ṭabarī, this narration is selected because the disciples were not in doubt.

Another claim is that they will be punished for only a few days. This claim is repeated in two places in the Qur'an: the first passage is mentioned in the context of distorting the Torah (Q 2:79-80), and the second passage is mentioned in the context of their rejection of the judgment of God (Q 3:24). Al-Ṭabarī alludes to various narrations and occasions of revelation from Ibn 'Abbās, Qatādah, Ibn Ishāq and Mujāhid which clarify the number of these few days. Al-Ṭabarī himself did not explain or fix the number of these few days, but he maintains the Jews know the number because God informed them. Ibn 'Abbās, Al-Suddī, and Qatādah, maintain that these few days intended were

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., vol. 14, p. 203

¹⁸¹ Ibid., vol. 9, p. 375

¹⁸² Ibid., vol. 9, p. 374

the forty days in which they worshipped the golden calf.¹⁸³ Mujāhid and Ibn Ishāq mentioned another narration that fixed these few days as seven.¹⁸⁴ Adding to this is the claim that the Jews or Christians will be the only people to be admitted to Paradise (Q 2:111-112). Al-Ṭabarī maintains that the meaning is not that they both agreed that only they will be admitted to Paradise, but that the Jews said that only they will be admitted to Paradise, and the Christians claimed the same thing for themselves.¹⁸⁵ He views that this response is a command from God towards any group or faith (i.e. Muslims, Jews, or Christians) and describes this command as just and fair to every community.¹⁸⁶

They also claimed that they are following guidance and are on the right path (Q 2:135). The Jews believe they are on the right path and so do the Christians. The Qur'an responds to this claim in the same passage, but the guidance is in following Abraham's way (*Ḥanīf*) (Q 2:135-137). After reviewing the interpretations of other exegetes, Al-Ṭabarī shed the light on the implied and deep meaning behind the Qur'anic response to this claim, which is to invite them to the religion of Abraham, which combines us all under monotheism.¹⁸⁷ They claim that Abraham was a Jew and that they are the inheritors (Q 3:65-68, 21:71-72, 2:140). The Qur'an responds to this claim in Q 2:124,135-136), confirming that the true followers of Abraham are those who follow his way (Q 3:68). Al-Ṭabarī considers that this passage alludes to a group of Jews and a group of Christians who declared this claim. He relied on the narrations of Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Ishaq which mention the names of the groups who claimed this.¹⁸⁸

They also claim that the Holy Land is granted to them (Q 7:137, 5:21). The Qur'an responds in Q 7:167-168, and 17:104. The claim that God is poor and they are rich (Q 3:181). This statement was said by the Jews in passage Q 2:245 and was revealed about lending God a goodly loan. They ridicule and proclaimed how God, who is rich, begs for loans from His people.¹⁸⁹ Al-Ṭabarī showed in his commentary on these passages that these claims demonstrate that various groups of Jews declared these claims, but not all of them. Some claim they are the chosen people; others claim that

¹⁸³ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 275,

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 278

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, p.507

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 510

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 102

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., vol. 10, pp. 1151-52

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., vol. 7, p. 443

their God is poor; others claims that guidance is only in their way; others did *Tahṛīf* (distortion) to the Torah. He views that the purpose of these claims is to show their superiority above others, and to show that they are on the right way and others are on the wrong one.

1.9 'They Are Not All Alike'

In the vast majority of the texts relating to the People of the Book in general, and the Jews in particular, the Qur'an employs a preposition and words such as *min* (among), *ba'd* (some), *illā* (except) or Ummah (community) to demonstrate that not all People of the Book are regarded the same in the sight of God. The text Q 3:113-115 is a clear reference which demonstrates that not all members of the People of the Book are the same. Al-Ṭabarī views that the passages emphasise that Jews are not equal; some of them believe and obey and others disbelieve and disobey; they vary in terms of good and bad; mischief and goodness. He alludes to the historical context, or occasion of revelation of this passage, stating that when a group of Jews i.e. 'Abdullāh Ibn Salām, Tha'labah Ibn Sa'yah, Usayd Ibn Sa'yah, Asad Ibn 'Ubayd, and others embraced Islam, some rabbis said: 'Only the evil amongst us believed in Muhammad, for had they been among our best they would not have abandoned the religion of their forefathers.' They also said to them: 'You incurred a great loss when you exchanged the religion of your forefathers with another religion.' Therefore, this passage (*They are not all alike...*) was revealed. Al-Ṭabarī also alludes to other occasions of revelation narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd who maintains that the passage referred to a group of Muslims, and not to the Jews. He also mentions the narrations of other exegetes such Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Mas'ūd, and Muqātil. He preferred the interpretation which maintains that the passage refers to the Jews in particular, as the context and previous passages deal with the Jews.¹⁹⁰

Other passages praise their knowledgeable scholars, as in *Sūrah Al-Nisā'* (Q 4:162), Al-Ṭabarī in his commentary emphasises the same point made above i.e. *Ahl Al-Kitāb* are not equal and maintains that this text excluded a group of Jews who do believe and obey. The previous passages described a group of Jews with bad characteristics and accused them of various allegations.¹⁹¹ He alludes to some of the knowledgeable

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., vol. 7, p. 118

¹⁹¹ Ibid., vol. 9, p. 378.

Jews (*rāsikhūna fi al-ʿilm minhum*) who knew and followed the laws of God. These knowledgeable people are considered a different group from those who were negatively described in the previous passages (Q 4:153-161).¹⁹² He maintains that the term ‘the People of the Book’ in the passages refers to the Jews because the context of the passages before and after deal with discourse on the Jews and the Children of Israel. He distinguishes between the destiny and fate of each one using the phrase ‘*wa aʿtadna lil-Kafirīna minhum ʿadhāban alīmā*, ‘For those of them that reject the truth we have prepared an agonizing torment,’ (Q 4:161) for the first group and ‘*ulāʾika sanuʿtihim ajran aẓīmā*, ‘to them We shall give a great reward.’ (Q 4:162).¹⁹³ In reference to the occasion of revelation, Al-Ṭabarī mentioned that this text was revealed when the Jews declared that those who converted to Islam are the evil amongst us. The text was revealed after God mentions the sins that the Jews committed in the earlier passages.¹⁹⁴

Similarly, God says (what is meant), ‘*Some of the People of the Book believe in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them...*’ (Q 3:199). According to Al-Ṭabarī, this passage refers to Najāshī when he died and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) offered a funeral prayer on him. The people accused him of praying for a Christian who had never seen him. Others mention that the passage refers to the Jews, ‘Abdullāh Ibn Salām and his companions, who converted to Islam. The passage mentions their good characteristics such as belief in God, belief in Prophet Muhammad’s message, and the previous messages, and submission to the will of God, ‘*they never sell God’s revelation for a small price.*’¹⁹⁵ Generally, these texts allude to the believers from the People of the Book; Jews and Christians who believed in their prophet and his teachings, and then believed in Muhammad’s message in his time.

Many similar passages of the Qur’an highlight that not all Jews and Christians are alike; some believe and others disbelieve, while some obey and others disobey. These texts also use terms or words such as *aktharuhum* (most of them), *illā qalīlā* (except a

¹⁹² Ibid., vol. 9, p. 393

¹⁹³ MS: Ar-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 5, pp. 429-440

¹⁹⁴ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl ayil-Qurʾan*, (Damascus: Muʿasasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 7, pp. 121-123

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

few), *min* (among), *kathīran minhum* (many among them), and *qawm* (group of people). This is found in the following passages: Q 3:75, 3:199-200, 4:155, 4:159, 4:161, 4:162, 4:172-73, 5:59, 5:66, 5:68-89, and 29:47). Other texts refer to two groups of the People of the Book, but only one of them can obtain salvation. However, the passages which mention the term *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, except in some cases, do not demonstrate what kind of Jews or Christians the text is referring to unless there is a context or historical event to clarify it. It is not sufficiently clear to identify which group of Jews the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was dealing with.¹⁹⁶ In the footnotes is a list of references to the People of the Book according to Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis. These references indicate the cases of their identification as Jews (J), Christians (C), or neither (N).

Furthermore, passage Q 5:82¹⁹⁷ is another interesting text which outlines the relationship between Jews, Christians, and Muslims and presents a clear contrast between enmity and affection within the three religions. Throughout the ages, exegetes have interpreted this passage in various ways. For instance, during the classical period, exegetes refrained from excessive interpretation and limited the reference to specific groups of Jews or Christians.¹⁹⁸ In the twentieth centuries, exegetes, such as Sayyid Quṭb, interpreted the Qur'an in light of historical events such as the Crusades, modern western imperialism, and contemporary Israeli colonialism.¹⁹⁹ In conclusion, it is notable that the direct, explicit Qur'anic discourse on the Jews in Al-Ṭabarī varies, describing the Jews with a fluctuating attitude. Criticism towards their attitude came as a result of disobedience to the instructions of God, rebellion against the prophets, and committing severe sins. However, these passages do not describe them all; it excludes those who are good among them. Various texts

¹⁹⁶ Sharon, M. 'People of the Book.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, University of Exeter. 21 May 2015 http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/people-of-the-book-EQSIM_00319

¹⁹⁷ 'You (Prophet) are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians...' (5:82)

¹⁹⁸ Ayoub, Mahmoud, *Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'an and Sunnah*, (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012) p.86

¹⁹⁹ These references indicate the cases of their identification as Jews (J), Christians (C), or neither (N): (Q 2:105 (N); 2:109 (J); 3:64 (C,J) 3:65 (C,J); 3:69 (J,C and J only); 3:70 (N); 3:71 (C,J); 3:72 (J of Madinah); 3:75 (C,J); 3:98 (C,J or J only); 3:99 (C,J, or J only); 3:110 (C,J); 3:113 (J who converted to Islam); 3:199 (C,J); 4:123 (C,J); 4:153 (J); 4:159 (C,J); 4:171 (C,J or C only); 5:15 (C,J); 5:19 (N); 5:59 (J) 5:65 (C,J); 5:68 (J); 5:77 (C,J) 29:46 (C); 33:26 (J); 57:29 (N or J); 59:2 (J of B. Naḍīr); 59:11 (J of B. Naḍīr); 98:1 (C,J) 98:6 (N))..

praise those who believed, obeyed, and did good deeds. Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis showed that the Qur'anic discourse towards the Children of Israel can be described as balanced, and fluctuating. It varies according to the deeds and attitude of the Jews themselves. It praises those who do good and do not break the law of the Torah or the covenant of God; and criticises those who disobey, do evil and break the teachings of the Torah. The discourse in this chapter was direct and explicit as it uses direct names and titles to address the Jews and the Children of Israel. The next chapter discusses the implicit and indirect discourse in the classical exegesis of Al-Ṭabarī through the sacred symbols and revered figures of the Jews.

CHAPTER TWO

The Implicit Discourse of the Qur'an on Jews

Introduction

The Qur'anic discourse on the Children of Israel is both explicit (or direct), and implicit (or indirect). It is also positive, negative, and polemical. This chapter will discuss the implicit and indirect discourse that emerges through the frequent mention of their sacred symbols and revered figures. Such sacred symbols and revered figures include their scripture, prophets, synagogues, and rabbis. These symbols provide clear reflections on the theme of the People of the Book in the Qur'an, signifying the ambivalent tone towards them; to distinguish between what is sacred and what is not. It also clarifies the role and relationship between these symbols and their followers.

The Qur'anic discourse gives a positive image regarding these sacred symbols and dedicates a portion of its texts to the positive narrative regarding their prophets, Book, and places of worship; and the fluctuating discourse concerning their religious leaders and rabbis. It refers a lot to the messengers sent to the Children of Israel from Isaac (Ishāq) until Jesus (ʿĪsā). They have been selected and chosen as the best amongst the creation and supported by miracles to assist them in their mission.

It also refers to their scripture, the Torah, around 18 times. All passages reveal that the Torah was given to Moses (pbuh), who conveyed it to the Children of Israel, and mentions that God gave Moses the Tablets on which He had written admonitions and explained all things.²⁰⁰ The discourse on the Torah demonstrates other polemical issues. It accuses the Children of Israel of having altered God's word, confounding the truth with falsehood, concealing the truth, hiding part of the book (Q 6:91), and twisting their tongues when reciting the book (Q 3:78). Therefore, the Qur'anic discourse maintains a positive attitude towards the sacred symbols, and a fluctuating attitude towards the followers of Judaism and the religious leaders. This chapter will investigate this implicit discourse on these symbols in the classical exegesis of Al-Ṭabarī and shed the light on the prophets of the Children of Israel and the history of

²⁰⁰ Adang Camilla P. 'Torah.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, 2015. University of Exeter. 07 June 2015 http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/torah-EQCOM_00206

using the Judeo-Christian sources by the early Muslim exegetes in general and Al-Ṭabarī in particular. This will make the implicit or indirect discourse about Jews clearer and clarify the positive, negative and polemical issues that the prophets have had with the Children of Israel throughout history.

2.1 Stance of the Jews towards their Prophets

The Qur'anic discourse on the prophets of the Children of Israel occupies a large portion of the Makkan and Madinan Qur'an and demonstrates positive tone and praises them for their good morals and the effort they exerted to convey His message. It sometimes gives more details about some prophets than others. This relies on the aims which serve the context and achieves the purpose of the discourse. The Qur'an uses the term *Banī Isrā'īl* to refer to the Children of Israel from the beginning and encompasses all the generations of *Banī Isrā'īl* and their prophets from Ṭalūt (Saul) to David (Q 5:78) and Jesus (Q 5:72-78; 43:59; 61:6,14). It also includes the Jewish community during the era of the Prophet Muhammad and their extended followers everywhere and anytime. The Qur'anic narrative on the prophets and messengers of *Banī Isrā'īl* include Isaac (Ishāq), Jacob (*Ya'qūb*) Joseph (*Yūsuf*), the Disciples (*Asbāt*), Job (*Ayyūb*), *Dhul-Kifl*, *Shu'ayb*, Moses (*Mūsa*), Aaron (*Harūn*), David (*Dawūd*), Solomon (*Sulayman*), Elijah (*Ilyās*), Elisha (*Alyas'a*), Jonah (*Yūnus*), Zachariah (*Zakariyya*), John (*Yahya*), and Jesus (*'Isa*).

As has been previously mentioned earlier, the Qur'anic discourse towards the prophets of the Children of Israel maintains a positive attitude, because they were elected and chosen by God to be prophets and messengers (Q 22:57). By contrast, other Judeo-Christian texts fail to show respect to the prophets and messengers as the Qur'an does. Therefore, the stance of *Banī Isrā'īl* towards their messengers was negative—as the Qur'an refers to in several passages. In many cases, they rejected, disobeyed, and mocked them. In other circumstances, they asked them many questions and made many requests in order to believe in them. There were even times where they persecuted and killed their prophets.²⁰¹

The Qur'an demonstrates some features of these stances towards their prophets in many passages. In Q 4:150-151, it shows that there are a group of Jews who believe

²⁰¹ Shalabī, Ahmad, *Al-Yahūdiyya*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Masriyyah, 8th edition, 1988), p. 146

in some prophets, such as Moses, and disbelieve in others, such as Jesus and Muhammad, peace be upon all of them.²⁰² The Jews also portrayed bad behaviour by some prophets such as Aaron (Q 20:83-91). They killed some of their prophets (Q 2:61, 2:87, 5:70, 3:21, 4:157-158), argued about Abraham's faith (Q 3:65-69), argued about Jesus's message (Q 3:59, 4:155-158), and argued about the Prophet Muhammad's message (Q 2:89, 2:118, 3:183).²⁰³ Al-Ṭabarī's commentary demonstrates that these passages about the attitude of the Jews towards their prophets vary between respect and hostility. Al-Ṭabarī for instance discusses the patience and struggle of Moses (pbuh) with *Banī Isrā'īl*, referring to reasons for revelations and historical contexts, and various interpretations of these texts.

2.2 Moses

Moses, who is of one the sacred symbols of the Jews and most respected prophet, is one of the most frequently mentioned prophets in both Makkan and Madinan Qur'an; and his name appears one-hundred and thirty-six times. Most of his narrative is found in the Madinan *Sūrahs* when Muhammad came in close contact with the Jews of Madinah.²⁰⁴ Many events in his life are described in the Qur'an, some in detail, some in brief, and others are repeated on more than one occasion. This can be found in *Sūrahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Mā'idah, Al-A'raf, Tā-Hā, Al-Shu'arā', and Al-Qaṣaṣ*.²⁰⁵ Two main themes can be noted in the narrative of Moses in the Qur'an: God as Creator and Lord, and a typological model that draws parallels to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). As in the narrative of other messengers, the Qur'an stresses monotheism, and Moses's role as a messenger to *Banī Isrā'īl*. In the Qur'anic preview, such details of Moses's narrative prefigure the *Sīrah* of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon them both. In most circumstances, the Qur'an addresses Muhammad directly, however, the contents are to serve as a timeless universal reminder (see Q 20:99).²⁰⁶

²⁰² MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.9, p. 352

²⁰³ Ṭanṭāwī, M. Sayyed, *Banū Isrā'īl fī al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Shurūq, 1997), p.151-161

²⁰⁴ Schöck, Cornelia. 'Moses.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 04 February 2015 http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/moses-EQCOM_00124

²⁰⁵ Tottoli, Roberto, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature*, (Surrey: TJ International Padstow, Cornwall, 2002), pp. 31-32

²⁰⁶ Schöck, Cornelia. 'Moses.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brillonline, University of Exeter. 04 February 2015 http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/moses-EQCOM_00124

The major events and references describing Moses in the Qur'an can be found in Q 28:1-6, which narrates the situation between Pharaoh and the Children of Israel in Egypt (Q 28:7-13, 20:38-41). The early life of Moses in the palace of Pharaoh, including how Moses kills the Egyptian man, is mentioned in Q 28:14-22; and in Q 28:22-28 the life of Moses in Midian is narrated. In all of Q 7:103-126, 10:75-83, 17:101-1-3, 20:49-69, 26:10-51, and 79:20-25, detailed accounts of Moses's and Pharaoh's altercations and dialogue are mentioned. Finally, Q 2:92, 7:103-105, 11:96, 14:5, 17:101, 23:45, 28:36, 29:39, and 43:46-47 discuss the signs and evidences of Moses's message.

Aaron the son of 'Imrān, the brother and companion of Moses, is mentioned by name over twenty times in the Qur'an. He is described in the Qur'an as a prophet (Q 4:163, 6:84), partner to Moses in his message (Q 25:35, 10:75, 20:29-36, 26:13, 28:35), and an eloquent speaker (Q 28:34-35). The worship of the golden calf is the main story wherein Aaron (pbuh) is involved. The Qur'an refers to this twice (Q 7:148-57 and 20:83-98) when Moses left with Gabriel for thirty days and designated his brother as his deputy over the Children of Israel.²⁰⁷ God gave Moses and his brother Aaron authority to go together to the Pharaoh asking him to believe in his message (Q 23:45, 28, 35, 4:153, 11:96).²⁰⁸ Al-Ṭabarī interpreted the word '*sultāna*' as evidences and signs.²⁰⁹ The aim behind the Qur'anic narrative on Moses is to remind Muslims of his events and deeds and link it to Muhammad's circumstances in order to learn two major themes; God as the Creator and Lord; and the similarities between Muhammad and Moses conditions.²¹⁰ The discourse about Moses in particular and other prophets of the Children of Israel in general can be described as polemical in most passages, and focusing more on the argumentative events and issues .

2.3 The Torah

It is clear in Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis that the Qur'an uses various terms that refer to the Torah such as Al-Kitāb or Al-Furqān (i.e. not Hebrew Bible or Old Testament).

²⁰⁷ Rippin, Andrew. 'Aaron.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, University of Exeter. 25 December 2012 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/aaron-SIM_00001

²⁰⁸ Schöck, Cornelia, "Moses", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Consulted online on 03 February 2019 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00124>

²⁰⁹ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.9, p. 360

²¹⁰ Schöck, Cornelia, "Moses", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Consulted online on 22 February 2019 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00124>

According to Al-Ṭabarī, the Torah is the scripture which was revealed by God to Moses on the mountain of Tur Sinai.²¹¹ He adds that the word Kitāb is explicitly interpreted for either or both of the Jewish and Christian scriptures i.e. Torah or the Gospel (see Q 2:121, 13:36). Although there are various interpretations of the word Kitāb by other exegetes, Al-Ṭabarī relied on the context to prove that it alludes to the Torah. In many passages, when the word *Kitāb* is used with Mūsa, it is always interpreted as Torah (Q 2:87). However, Al-Ṭabarī interprets the word Kitāb differently when it comes with the word Torah in the same passage (see Q 3:48). In this context, Al-Ṭabarī states that the word Kitāb here means writing.²¹²

The Qur'anic discourse on the Torah adopts positive tone and regards it as guidance and law for the Children of Israel and one of the divine scriptures that every Muslim must believe in (see Q 3:3).²¹³ The word 'Torah' is mentioned eighteen times in the Qur'an and is combined with the Gospel (*al-Injīl*) in most cases. In *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, for instance, it is repeated five times (Q 3:3, 48, 50, 65, 93) and six times in *Al-Mā'idah* (Q 5:43, 44, 46, 66, 68, 110); and throughout the Qur'an (Q 7:157, 9:111, 48: 29, 61:6, and 62:5).²¹⁴ The word 'Book' also refers to the Torah sent to Moses and Aaron to the Children of Israel (see Q 2:53-87, 6:91, and 11:17). Other passages mention the word 'Book' referring to the revelation sent to both the Jews and Christians or to the Jews individually. This is found in Makkan and Madinan passages (see Q 2:113, 121, 145, 146; 3:19; 23:70, 71, 29:46). However, all passages using the word 'Torah' were revealed in Madinah when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) came into close contact with the Jews of Madinah.²¹⁵ The Qur'an also uses the term *Furqān*, 'criterion', to refer to the Torah (Q 2:53, 21:48) which distinguishes between right and wrong. Al-Ṭabarī refers to Ibn 'Abbās's statement that the word Furqān refers to divine Books: Torah, Gospel, Psalms, and the Qur'an. The intended meaning in the text is to be understood through the context.²¹⁶ Similarly, in *Sūrah Al-A'rāf* (Q 7:145, 150-154), it uses the term '*alwāḥ*', referring to the 'tablets' that God revealed to Moses, and

²¹¹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 159

²¹² Berg, Herbert. "Ṭabarī's Exegesis of the Qur'anic Term Al-Kitāb." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 63, no. 4, 1995, pp. 761–774. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1465467.

²¹³ Abdullah, Yusuf, '*Awdun 'ala bid' fi Jibillat al-Yahūd*, (Riyadh; Maktabat al-Tawbah, 1988,) p. 38

²¹⁴ Adang, Camilla P. 'Torah.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*... 12 December 2012 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/torah-COM_00206

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 2, p. 70

explains the teachings of the Torah to the Children of Israel. Another term ‘*ṣuḥuf*’, ‘Scrolls’, is also used with reference to Abraham and Moses (see Q 53:36-7, 87:19) and it is not certain whether it is part of the Torah or if it is another name for it, or a separate revelation. Al-Ṭabarī maintains that the intended meaning of the word ‘*ṣuḥuf*’ which is the plural of ‘*ṣaḥīfah*’ is the scrolls of Abraham and the Torah for Moses.. He also refers to the interpretation of Qatādah who maintains that the *ṣuḥuf* here refer to the Torah as well.²¹⁷

The Qur’an relates the history of the revelation of the Torah starting with the advent of Moses²¹⁸, ‘...*We inscribed everything for him in the Tablets which taught and explained everything, saying, ‘Hold on to them firmly and urge your people to hold fast to their excellent teachings...*’ (Q 7:142-145). In his commentary on this passage, Al-Ṭabarī does not give a clear interpretation of the meaning of *alwāḥ* ‘tablets’ and whether it alludes to the Torah or was revealed before it; whether it constitutes another set of revelations, is also debated.²¹⁹ Figures given for the total number of Scrolls revealed by God vary between fifty and one hundred and sixty three; those given to Moses are stated to number ten or fifty.²²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī explains that these Tablets contain what is lawful and what is unlawful.

Muslim scholars believe the Torah that the Qur’an is referring to is not the current Hebrew Bible. They are also aware that there were different versions of the Torah in existence before its translation into Arabic (i.e the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Greek Septuagint. That is why Muslim scholars like Ibn Hazm consider these differences between the two versions as a proof of distortion (*Tahrīf*).²²¹

The Qur’anic discourse on the Torah focuses on the guidance and the light of this Book (Q 5:44), the alteration of the Word of God (Q 2:75-79, 4:46, 5:13), its followers intentionally confounding the truth with falsehood (Q 2:42, 3:71), concealing the truth

²¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 377

²¹⁸ Moses’ name is mentioned 136 times more than Prophet Muhammad whose name is mentioned four times and Jesus, whose name is mentioned 25 times.

²¹⁹ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl ayil-Qur’an*, (Damascus: Mu’asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 13, p. 106

²²⁰ Adang, Camilla P., “Torah”, in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an*, Consulted online on 22 February 2019 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00206>

²²¹ Ibid.

(Q 3:187), and concealing part of the Torah (6:91).²²² It can be noted that the Qur'anic discourse on the Torah is distinct from the discourse on the Jews. Describing the Torah as guidance and light; explaining the contents of the Torah and showing how some groups follow these teachings and how others disobey play an important role in demonstrating the positive, negative and polemical tone of the Qur'an.

2.4 Synagogues

In his commentary on passage Q 22:40²²³, Al-Ṭabarī narrated various interpretations of the four names mentioned in the passage: *Ṣawāmi'*, *Biya'*, *Ṣalawāt*, and *Masājid* and prefers the term *Ṣalawāt* as a meaning for the Jewish place of worship i.e. synagogue. He differed with the interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās of the word *Ṣalawāt* as 'the churches' not the synagogue and Mujāhid who maintains that *Ṣalawāt* means the places of worship of *Ahl Al-Kitāb*.²²⁴ The four names mentioned in the passage i.e. *Ṣawāmi'* (monasteries), *Biya'* (churches), *Ṣalawāt* (synagogues), and *Masājid* (Mosques) are given various interpretations from exegetes; however, he maintains that his view is in agreement with the original meanings of these terms in the Arabic language and traditions. What other exegetes mention might have one feature or meaning in the Arabic language, but not the original.²²⁵

Al-Ṭabarī refers to the different views of exegetes in order to analyse whether it is the term *Biya'* or *Ṣalawāt* that is referring to the Jewish places of worship. He views that the term *Ṣawāmi'* means monasteries; *Biya'* refers to Christian churches, *Ṣalawāt* refers to Jewish synagogues; and *Masājid* refers to Muslim mosques.²²⁶ In Arabic, the term '*kanīs*' refers to the places of worship for both Jews and Christians.²²⁷ Although the Qur'anic discourse on Jewish places of worship appears in very few passages, it aids being able to understand the reflection and image of the Jews through their places of worship in the Qur'an in both classical and contemporary exegeses.

²²² Adang, Camilla P. 'Torah.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brillonline, University of Exeter. 08 June 2015 http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/torah-EQCOM_00206

²²³ '...If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed.' (Q 22:40)

²²⁴ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 18, pp. 648-50

²²⁵ Ibid., vol. 18, p. 651

²²⁶ Ibid., vol. 18, p. 650

²²⁷ See Ali, Jawwad, *Al-Mufasssal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab qabl al-Islam*, (Baghdad: Baghdad University, 1993) vol. 12, p. 226

2.5 Rabbis

Al-Ṭabarī considers the two terms *rabbāniyyūn*, plural of *rabbānī*, and *aḥbār*, plural of *ḥabr*, meaning rabbis or scholars, to refer to Jewish religious leaders. He states the exegetes' interpretations of both terms and the meaning of *ḥabr* and *rabbānī* which revolve around the meaning of Jewish scholars and religious leaders (rabbis).²²⁸ He refers to the interpretation of *Al-Ḍaḥḥāk*, who maintains that *rabbāniyyūn* are the reciters of the Torah and *aḥbār* are the jurists. Mujāhid and Ibn 'Abbās said, *rabbāniyyūn* are the jurists and that they are higher than the *aḥbār*. Ibn Wahb said, *rabbāniyyūn* are the leaders and *aḥbār* are the scholars. Qatādah said, *rabbāniyyūn* are the jurists and *aḥbār* are the scholars. He preferred the meaning that *rabbāniyyūn* are the educators, reformers and those who reconcile people's affairs. According to him, they are higher in religious knowledge and worldly affairs.²²⁹

The Qur'anic discourse about the rabbis can divide them into three types. The first category are praised for their deeds and characteristics, as in *Sūrah Al-Mā'idah* (Q 5:44).²³⁰ According to Al-Ṭabarī, rabbis and religious people are praised here for being guides and trustees for the Jewish society, and for following the steps of the Torah and their prophets.²³¹ The second category is criticised for their shortcomings and negligence; advice is given to them in Q 5:63.²³² The passage criticises the rabbis and scholars who neglected their role and did not advise their people to stop doing bad deeds. The same two terms i.e. *rabbāniyyūn* and *aḥbār*, are also repeated here and refer to the rabbis who did not forbid the evil actions of the Jewish community. Al-Ṭabarī maintains that the passage criticises Jewish rabbis and scholars for not forbidding the bad deeds committed by the Jews at that time.²³³ The third group is criticised for letting their followers take them as masters and lords; misguiding them and making them blind followers; forbidding them from what is lawful and permitting

²²⁸ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.10, p. 343

²²⁹ Ibid., vol.6, p. 544

²³⁰ 'We revealed the Torah with guidance and light, and the prophets, who had submitted to God, judged according to it for the Jews. So did the rabbis and the scholars in accordance with that part of God's Scripture which they were entrusted to preserve, and to which they were witnesses...' (Q 5:44)

²³¹ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 10, p. 343

²³² 'Why do their rabbis and scholars not forbid them to speak sinfully and consume what is unlawful?...?' (Q 5:63)

²³³ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.10, p. 448

what is unlawful. This group is mentioned in *Sūrah Al-Tawbah* (Q 9:31).²³⁴ In this passage, criticism is directed to both the rabbis and their followers as they both distort the law of the Torah by allowing what is forbidden and forbidding what is allowed. Al-Ṭabarī adds that the literal meaning of this sentence: '*They take their rabbis and their monks as lords*' is not intended, but the intended meaning is that their followers followed them blindly and accepted their verdicts which disagree with the Torah.²³⁵

The last passage criticises another group of rabbis for their bad characteristics, such as those who wrongfully consume people's wealth and turn people away from God's guidance. God says (what is meant), '*Believers, many rabbis and monks wrongfully consume people's possessions and turn people away from God's path...*' (Q 9:34). Al-Ṭabarī states this group of rabbis are criticised for taking bribery and unlawful money for their religious verdicts and altering the words of God.²³⁶

Unlike the positive discourse on the Torah, Moses, and the synagogue, the discourse on rabbis and Jewish religious leaders fluctuates. Some passages praise them and their actions for following and judging according to the law of the Torah, while others criticise them for breaking and altering it. To conclude this chapter, the implicit Qur'anic discourse reflects a varied tone towards the Children of Israel. This emerges through the frequent mention of their sacred symbols and figures, such as prophets, books, places of worship, and religious leaders. It also shows how such discourse reflects the image of the Jews with their prophets and their stories which occupy a large portion of the Qur'an. This is to give lessons or advice to people, to take warnings from the fate of the previous nations, and to give the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) powerful support to deliver his message with patience and certainty in faith.

Generally, it can be noted that Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis shows that the Qur'an employs a friendly language when dealing with the Books or messengers or places of worship of the Jews, and employs various tones when dealing with the Children of Israel and the Jews themselves.²³⁷ Moreover, in his commentaries on the passages related to the Jews, Al-Ṭabarī employed much of the historical context and occasion of revelation

²³⁴ '*They take their rabbis and their monks as lords, as well as Christ, the son of Mary. But they were commanded to serve only one God...*' (Q 9:31)

²³⁵ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.14, pp. 216-217

²³⁶ Ibid., vol.14, p. 216

²³⁷ Abu Ḥamdān, Muhammad, *Ḥaḳīqat mawqif al-Islām min al-Adyān wa al-Madhāhib al-Fikriyyah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Bayruni, 2006) pp. 44-45.

of these texts and linked them to the era of Muhammad. Al-Ṭabarī relies more on the traditions and the historical context of these texts, referring to the many narrations of the companions of Muhammad (pbuh), their followers, and other exegetes.

PART TWO

CHRISTIANS IN THE CLASSICAL EXEGESIS OF AI-ṬABARĪ

Introduction

There is an intriguing interplay between how adherents to a faith and how outsiders to it define that tradition. This part highlights the explicit and implicit Qur'anic discourse on the Nasara, and their tradition. This discourse is fluctuating and carries a varied tone between negative and positive towards this religious group. Some of this discourse also carries a polemic discourse that underpins the divergence between Islam and Christianity in conceptualising these personalities. This has thrust to the fore the Christian concepts of the Trinity and the Divine Incarnation, and the Qur'anic approach in its unequivocal condemnation of these concepts. The stakes are made higher as Jesus occupies a major role in Muslim eschatology. Whereas studies have been predominantly occupied by this religious polemic, the Islamic portrayal of Christians as a religio-social group has garnered relatively less attention, despite Qur'anic references to this effect being available in abundance.²³⁸

The Qur'anic terms that refer to Christians are various. The most obvious one is *al-nasara*, which is found fourteen times in the Qur'an. Another is *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, which is usually used as a collective for Christians and Jews; this is also expressed as a phrase (e.g. '*those who were given the Book*'). A more direct phrase used for Christians are '*those who followed (Jesus)*'. The latter of these three has been expounded on by Muslim exegetes as proof of Islam's tolerance towards other faiths. This extrapolation, a careful study would uncover, is found almost exclusively in the context of Qur'anic verses referring to Christians, to the extent that some Christian commentators felt that the Qur'an upholds Christianity as a salvific avenue. Naturally, Muslims did not accept this, culminating in a rebuttal of this idea by the fourteenth century Muslim theologian, Ibn Taymiyyah, in his multi-volume Arabic treatise, the title of which is translated as *The Correct Response to Those Who Have Changed the Religion of the Messiah*.

Similar to the Jews, the Christians are also addressed exclusively in three types of general discourse in the Qur'an. The first type is explicit and directly addresses them

²³⁸ See McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) pp. 1-3

as a particular group who follow Jesus or Christianity. The second type of address is implicit and alludes to Christians through their sacred symbols and figures such as the Gospel, Jesus, Mary, the disciples (*ḥawāriyyūn*) and theological indictments.²³⁹ From these two types, a third type of discourse can be deducted, the polemical discourse, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven. These types of discourses are fluctuating. They contain various tones of praise, criticism, and polemics, which are comprehended and interpreted contrastingly by the classical exegesis of Al-Ṭabarī and Western scholars. Non-Muslim scholars view the passages that praise Christians and even the Jews to have been revealed in the early period when Prophet Muhammad was expecting them to believe in his message. Subsequently, this tone became harsher when they rejected his message, and even resisted it. Therefore, the injunction in *Sūrah Al-Tawbah* (Q 9:29) allowed Muslims to fight against them.²⁴⁰ In light of the persistence of an ambivalent tone, which is repeated in both the Makkan and the Madinan Qur'an, this viewpoint is incorrect, because the change was in the tone and not in the common principles and belief, as will be explained later.

The Qur'anic discourse on Christians can also be classified into negative, positive, and polemical, just as it was for Jews. These classifications can be extrapolated from Al-Ṭabarī's commentaries, despite the fact that he himself is not explicitly making them. Although the Jews occupy a larger portion of the Qur'an in comparison to the Christians, more passages celebrate the latter. This will be discussed in detail in this chapter. McAuliffe (b. 1944 CE) maintains that the negative discourse or criticism is more extensive in content than that of praise, which is scattered throughout the Qur'an.²⁴¹ McAuliffe adds that collating all the Qur'anic references to Christians would require a comprehensive study of the Qur'anic scripture, the usage of indices, and a grounding in Qur'anic exegesis to identify those passages that refer to Christians (or Christians and Jews together). The body of references would then be sub-categorised. The first sub-category is the largest, which is the criticisms that are mainly theological in nature, but also ethical, levelled at Christians. Another sub-category, one would find, is the prescription of Muslim behaviour towards Christians—social, economic and in

²³⁹ See McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) pp. 1-3

²⁴⁰ Peters, F.E., *Islam: A Guide for Jews and Christians*, (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 27

²⁴¹ McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 1-3

relation to physical religious infrastructures like monasteries and churches.²⁴² F.E. Peters (b. 1927 CE) views that the passage Q 5:82 refers to Christians in more cordial relations with Muslims than the Jews.²⁴³ Mahmoud Ayoub (b. 1938 CE) provides an in-depth explanation in relation to this point. He mentions that the Qur'an divides humanity into two categories, people of belief or believers (*mu'minūn*), and people of disbelief or rejecters (*kuffār*). Those in the first category believe in one Creator, the Lord of the universe, while the second group rejects this belief.²⁴⁴

This part comprises of two chapters exploring the terms used for Christians in the Qur'an, followed by an examination of the explicit and implicit Qur'anic discourse on the Christians (*Naṣārā*) in light of the classical commentary of Al-Ṭabarī. God addressing Christians is the primary characteristic of the explicit discourse contained in the Qur'an's passages; while the implicit discourse takes the form of mentioning their sacred symbols or revered figures; namely, Jesus, the Gospel, churches, monks and priests revered by Christians. These explicit and implicit discourses demonstrate the fluctuating Qur'anic tone towards the *Naṣārā* themselves, the priests among them, and laity alike. It will also elaborate on the positive remarks towards their sacred symbols and revered figures.

Qur'anic Terms and Definitions for Christians

It would be useful to compare the various terms the Qur'an uses to denote Christians from within the Islamic traditions itself. Understanding the meaning of these terms will help us to understand the Qur'anic discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in general and Christians in particular. These terms are *Naṣārā* (Christians), *Ahl Al-Kitāb* (People of the Book), *Al-Rūm* (the Byzantine), *Ḥawāriyyūn* (Disciples), *Anṣār* (supporters)²⁴⁵, *Mushrikīn* (polytheists), *Kuffār* (rejecters or disbelievers), *Ẓālimūn* (wrongdoers), and *Fāsiqūn* (transgressors). Some of these terms have been elaborated on already, except a few.

The term *Naṣārā* is the most common when directly referring to Christians, and is repeated fifteen times in the Qur'an. Most exegetes interpret the origins of the word to

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Peters, F.E., *Islam: A Guide for Jews and Christians*, (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 27

²⁴⁴ Ayoub, Mahmoud, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, (New York, Orbis Books, 2007) pp. 188-189.

²⁴⁵ Parrinder, Geoffrey, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965) pp. 152-3

the locality of Nazareth.²⁴⁶ According to Al-Ṭabarī, they are called *Naṣārā* either because they support each other, or because they lived in *Nāṣirah*.²⁴⁷ This designation refers to the name given to Jesus by his contemporaries, who called him Jesus of the Nazarene, and his disciples were called 'Nazarenes' by the Jews.²⁴⁸ The Qur'an mentions the term *Naṣārā* for all types of Christians such as Byzantine, Monophysite, and Nestorian,²⁴⁹ and it appears alongside discussions of other faith groups such as Jews, Sabians, Magians (Zoroastrians), and polytheists (see Q 2:59-26, 5:73, and 22:17).

Al-Ṭabarī, alluding to other exegetic explanations, interprets the term *anṣār* in the Qur'an to refer to supporters, followers, or disciples of Jesus (pbuh).²⁵⁰ There are three explanations for this term: the first derives from the root *Naṣārā* which means support or help, the second refers to people who belong to a place called *Nāṣirah*, and the third is based on the Qur'anic passage (Q 61:14) in which Jesus asked his disciples to be his supporters for God. According to Al-Ṭabarī, the second meaning is the most accurate in defining the term, because it is supported by a number of the Prophet Muhammad's statements in which the village *Nāṣirah*, where Jesus used to live, is identified.²⁵¹

The term *ḥawāriyyūn* or *ḥawārī* is invariably mentioned five times in four passages in three *Sūrahs*, three of which are Madinan *Sūrahs* (Q 3:52, 5:12, 61:14), and clearly refer to the companions of Jesus. The word *ḥawārī* means approximately the same as the word *anṣār* in the Islamic tradition. Although Al-Ṭabarī maintains that *ḥawāriyyūn* to mean his supporters (*wuzarā'*, ministers). He quoted other interpretations and meanings from various exegetes.²⁵² They were given this name because of the white cloth they put on.²⁵³ He refers to many narrations and meanings about the reason for

²⁴⁶ A. Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary of the Qur'an*, (Baroda: 1938) pp. 280-1

²⁴⁷ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 2, p. 144

²⁴⁸ See the Acts of the Apostles (24:5),

²⁴⁹ Parrinder, Geoffrey, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965) pp. 152-3

²⁵⁰ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 23, p. 365

²⁵¹ McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 95

²⁵² MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 23, p. 366

²⁵³ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 450

naming *ḥawāriyyūn*, and preferred the meaning of people of white cloth.²⁵⁴ However, Christian sources, including the New Testament, view that the term *ḥawāriyyūn* refers to the apostles or disciples of Jesus in the sense that they had been entrusted with a mission by him rather than in the sense of having been entrusted with a mission by God.²⁵⁵

Ahl Al-Kitāb is a term which collectively describes Jews and Christians in the Qur'an, and occasionally refers exclusively either to Christians or Jews, depending on the context of the passage. The Qur'an is more specific when it mentions the Christians using the term *Ahl Al-Injīl* (Q 5:47) and the Jews with '*Banī Isrā'īl*', Children of Israel.²⁵⁶

The term *Ahl Al-Kitāb* (People of the Book) who are mentioned around 54 times in the Qur'an, most of them (around forty times), are called *Banī Isrā'īl* (Children of Israel), who were reckoned to be the contemporary Jews. The *Naṣārā*, are mentioned 14 times who, according to the Qur'an, were the ones who say, "The Messiah is the son of God" (Q 9:30). In other words those whom others regularly call Christians, who in one place in the Qur'an are also named '*Ahl Al Injīl*' (People of the Gospel). In every place in the Qur'an where the *Naṣārā* are explicitly named, so too are the Jews, indicating their close association in the Qur'an as fellow Children of Israel.²⁵⁷

Alongside this term, others are also employed to refer specifically to Christians, such as in *Sūrah Al-Rūm* (Q 30:1-5), the passages describing the Byzantine conflict with the Sasanian Persian Empire referring to Christians as *Al-Rūm*. According to Al-Ṭabarī, the Byzantines were routed at the hands of the Sasanians, but the Byzantines (i.e. *Ahl Al-Kitāb*) will be the victors in the not-too-distant future with the believers rejoicing that event.²⁵⁸ There are other terms in Islamic tradition which have been coined, such as *Masīḥī* (lit. a person who follows *al-Masīḥ*, the Messiah, i.e. Jesus) or *Masīḥiyyūn* (followers of Jesus the Messiah) that are neither mentioned nor used in

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Fatoohi, Louay, *The Mystery of the Historical Jesus, the Messiah in the Qur'an, the Bible, and Historical Sources* (Luna Plena Publishing, UK, 2009) p. 703

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Griffith, Sidney H. "The Qur'an's 'Nazarenes' and Other Late Antique Christians: Arabic-Speaking 'Gospel People' in Qur'anic Perspective²." *Christsein in Der Islamischen Welt: Festschrift Für Martin Tamcke Zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by Sidney H. Griffith and Sven Grebenstein, 1st ed., Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2015, pp. 81–106. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc77120.9.

²⁵⁸ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 20, p. 68

the Qur'an.²⁵⁹ The Qur'anic identification of *Masīḥ* for Jesus occurs eleven times in Madinan *Sūrahs* without any connection to his followers. The context aids the exegetes to identify who exactly these refer to. Also, an analysis of the occasion of revelation provides a fitting context to ascertain the identity of the group or groups being mentioned. Furthermore, the clarification of the content of these terms aid an understanding of the discourses of the Qur'an on the Jews and Christians.

²⁵⁹ Reynolds, Gabriel Said, *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, New York: 2011, p. 301

3. CHAPTER THREE

The Explicit Discourse of the Qur'an on Christians

The explicit discourse on Christians is repeated occasionally in the Qur'an and directed towards them and other communities of faith, under the general heading of the People of the Book. At times, the Qur'an uses terms which explicitly refer to Christians, such as *Naṣārā* or *Ahl Al-Injīl* (Q 5:47). In Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis, various terms and designations are used to refer to Christians with explicit names such as *Naṣārā*, monks, and priests, and with implicit names such as 'who follow you (Jesus)' or 'those to whom the book before (was revealed)', or 'the sinners'.²⁶⁰ Most of this discourse on Christians occurs in the Madinan Qur'an i.e. the last ten years of Muhammad's life. It has been argued that the Qur'anic attitude toward Christians from the beginning is of both praise and criticism. It simultaneously reflects the two tones in one discourse; that is to say, both criticism and praise can be noted in the same passage. The following is an example: '*...We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers. But monasticism was something they invented— We did not ordain it for them— only to seek God's pleasure, and even so, they did not observe it properly...*' (Q 57:27). The previous passage refers to how God sent messengers and prophets such as Noah and Abraham and their offspring with scriptures, such as the Psalms, Parchments, and Scrolls, to their people. However, some of them chose guidance while the majority were disobedient. Al-Ṭabarī commented on the occasion of revelation for this passage saying that some groups of the Christians decided to monasticise (isolate themselves) away from their king who altered the Gospel in order not to disobey God. However, they practised it in accordance to their desire, and not to the guidance of God.²⁶¹ The passage also demonstrates the reasons for the ambivalent discourse toward Christians and used positive and negative discourse about them, because it praises those who deserve

²⁶⁰ McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 285

²⁶¹ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarir, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 23, p. 204

praise and criticises those who deserve criticism. Therefore, these passages end with categorising them into believers and lawbreakers.²⁶²

Several friendly passages appear in the Qur'an (Q 2:62, 5:82, 57:27) towards a group of *Naṣārā*²⁶³ and promised the believers and good-doers among them reward, no grief, and fair Judgment. Other passages confirm the scripture of the Christians (Gospel) as guidance and light to people (Q 3:3, and 5:45, 46). There are also passages to Christians and their priests and monks, that depict respect and fairness (Q 5:82, 2:62, 3:69).²⁶⁴ On the other hand, unfriendly passages demonstrate sharp criticism for various reasons relating to theological issues such as exaggeration in their belief (Q 4:171 and 5:77); rejecting belief in the trinity and incarnation (Q 4:171; 5:17, 72, 73, 116, 117); the status of Jesus (Q 3:59); and rejection of the crucifixion (Q 4:157). These issues will be discussed in the features of positive and negative discourse within Al-Ṭabarī's commentary.

It can be noted in Al-Ṭabarī's commentary that these passages are just examples to demonstrate the fluctuating tone which the Qur'an employs to reflect the discourse towards Christians; and the positive tone on the sacred symbols and revered figures. This fluctuating tone is not only in the Qur'an, rather, it is also confirmed by the Prophet Muhammad's statements and in his debate with the Christians of Najran.²⁶⁵ This proves the acceptance of Christians as fellow believers in God and agrees with the confirmation of Waraqah Ibn Nawfal, Khadijah's cousin, who declared that Prophet Muhammad's revelation is similar to the revelation received by Moses. It also reflects the kindness of the Christian Emperor of Abyssinia, who gave asylum to a group of Muslims who escaped from the persecution of the Pagans in Makkah.²⁶⁶ It can be noted, that the criticism towards Christians in the Qur'an does not revolve around social or political issues, but rather religious and theological ones.²⁶⁷ In other words, criticism, praise or polemics towards Christians in the Qur'an addresses the

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Watt, W. M., *Muslims-Christians Encounters, Perceptions and Misperceptions*, (London: Routledge, 1991) p.15

²⁶⁴ Ayoub, Mahmoud, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, (New York, Orbis Books, 2007) p. 20-21

²⁶⁵ Watt, W. M., *Muslims-Christians Encounters, Perceptions and Misperceptions*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p.15

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p.15

²⁶⁷ Ayoub, Mahmoud, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, (New York, Orbis Books, 2007) p. 19

theological and religious beliefs or changes they did to the teachings of Christianity, and their attitude or disobedience to the Gospel or Jesus.

3.1. The Tone of the Makkan *Sūrahs* towards the Christians

The Makkan Qur'anic discourse covers the story of Jesus and his mother Mary less than the Madinah one. A few *Sūrahs* and passages of the Makkan revelation focus on some narrative of Jesus and his family. For instance, *Sūrah Maryam*, a Makkan *Sūrah*, makes passage to the Prophet Zachariah, Mary, and Jesus, and relates to two main themes: the first is the issue of *Tawḥīd* (monotheism) and negation of *Shirk* (polytheism), and the second is the stories of prophets which constitute around two thirds of the *Sūrah*. The issues of Islamic creed are frequently one of the main themes that the Makkan *Sūrahs* cover.²⁶⁸ The discourse in this example of the Makkan *Sūrah* demonstrates two attitudes: one is to criticise polytheism (trinity) which Christians practise while confirming the oneness of God, and the other is to commemorate the noble characteristics of Jesus, his family, and the other prophets.²⁶⁹

Another Makkan passage of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* including Christians is in *Sūrah Al-Qaṣaṣ*. The passage reads, '*Those to whom We gave the Scripture before believe in it, and, when it is recited to them, say, 'We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord...' (Q 28:52-55)* This Makkan passage is similar to the Madinan passage of *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān* which reads: '*Some of the People of the Book believe in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them: humbling themselves before God...*' (Q 3:199). Both refer to the positive attitude, praise, and reward. Al-Ṭabarī discussed the historical context and occasion of revelation for this positive tone toward the Christians, and refers to the narration that says it was revealed when seventy priests were sent by the King of Abyssinia to meet Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Makkah. He recited *Sūrah Maryam* and explained the teachings of Islam to them. Thereafter, they converted as a result.²⁷⁰ The reader of Al-Ṭabarī's explanation might understand that the intended meaning and reward is only for this group of that era and does not extend to include any other group. The meaning in this passages applies to any group who

²⁶⁸ MS: Quṭb, Sayyid, *Fī Ṣilāl al-Qur'an*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Shurūq, 19) vol. 5, p. 88

²⁶⁹ MS: Al-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Maḥāṣin al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 10, p. 304, and MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 18, p. 195

²⁷⁰ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 7, pp. 498-500

have these characteristics (i.e. belief in God and in all revealed scriptures). Regardless of what the correct narration is, they all refer to one meaning, which is that groups of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* who believe and practice their faith and also believe in the next revelation will get their reward in the Hereafter. Their characteristics are similar to the characteristics of Muslims who believe and practise. This is the only passage in the Qur'an which mentions two rewards for *Ahl Al-Kitāb* who believe in both their faith and Islamic faith. Similar passages can be seen in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, *Al-Mā'idah* and *Al-Hajj* (Q 2:62, 5:69, 22:17) mentioning one reward. Such passages emphasise the importance of belief and practice for all people of faith, including Muslims.

Another example of the Makkan Qur'an which has a positive tone is in Q 29: 46.²⁷¹ This positive discourse becomes clearer when the time and the occasion of revelation is recognised. Al-Ṭabarī refers to various narrations from other scholars and exegetes about the phrase '*argue only in the best way with the People of the Book*' and the phrase '*except with those of them who act unjustly...*' (Q 29:46); but he maintains his opinion that polemics portrayed in the best way should be with People of the Book who believed. Those who do not believe, we should not argue with them, that is why it says, '*except with those of them who act unjustly...*'. Those who act unjustly either by disbelief or disobedience are excluded.²⁷² Al-Ṭabarī refers to another interpretation of the word *Jidāl* (argument) which is fighting or war. That is to say, 'do not argue with People of the Book with fighting except those who act unjustly and fight, you can fight them.'

Similar Makkan passages refer to the same concept in *Sūrah Al-Nahl* '(Prophet), call (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way...' (Q 16:125). The two passages demonstrate two positive attitudes in polemics: significance of *Jidāl* in the best manner with the Jews and Christians and confirmation of belief in all revelations during the Makkan era of Islam. In his commentaries on this passage, Al-Ṭabarī does not mention that it deals with the People of the Book. He maintains that the calling here refers to everyone including People of the Book.

²⁷¹ '(Believers), argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly...' (Q 29:46)

²⁷² MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.20, p. 46

Analysing the polemical discourse of the Qur'an on the reflection of Muhammad's mission and encounter with the Makkan pagans, the Jews and Christians of the Madinah, the Qur'anic revelation of the Makkan period does not mention the opposition to the Jews and Christians. In fact, the remarks in the Qur'an concerning them in this period of revelation is in a positive light, looking at them as the heirs to the revealed scriptures of the Torah and Gospel. The distinction appears mainly during the Madinan period, especially after the battle of Badr, where Muhammad (pbuh) won a decisive victory against his Makkan pagan counter parts. The contentions between himself and the Jewish-Christian community also intensified. As a result of which Islam separated itself completely from them, and Muhammad established a religious identity that was independent, his political authority by this stage also aided to reinforce the individuality of Islam. Thus, from this point onwards the Qur'anic language appears to have become more polemical in its address to other faiths.²⁷³

Nonetheless, many Muslim scholars do not conclude that the above reasons were a basis for this shift in the Qur'an's polemical language; in their argument if this was the case, it would deny the Qur'an of its divine nature and imply that it was based on human encounters. Consequently, they regard the polemical passages to be of absolute relation to faith and ignore the prophet's political activity, which to them had no influence on the way in which the Qur'an spoke to other faiths. However, even if one was to disregard the point that the prophet's political activities are non-related to the polemical passages, the consideration of the Qur'an's passages being revealed in response to circumstances is still valid. Modern scholars, have highlighted the stark difference in the Makkan and Madinan verses and they attributed the implicit change in the discourse to that of the prophet's encounters. Therefore, the relationship between the Qur'anic revelation and the prophets mission does not disown the Divine nature of the Qur'an. Rather the polemical passages by latter scholars were understood considering the prophet's Mission, interpreted and understood by analysing the occasion of revelation. Some scholars have cited the occasion of revelation to understand the passages of the Qur'an in its historical context as proof of its divine nature.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Sirry, Mun'im, *Scriptural Polemics, The Qur'an and Other Religions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 63

²⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 63-65

3.2 The Tone of Madinan *Sūrahs* towards the Christians

It can also be noted that the Makkan *Sūrahs* which contain several passages of polemical discourse against pagans and disbelievers are not the same as the Madinan *Sūrahs* which contain less polemical passages. However, the Madinan Qur'an contains a good deal of polemical passages against Jews and Christians.²⁷⁵ In his book *Al-Fihrist*, Ibn Al-Nadīm also mentions a list of *Sūrahs* narrated by Nu'mān Ibn Bashīr according to the chronological order of revelation. This chronological order is important as it helps to understand the time and the purpose of revelation, and the gradual development of the Qur'anic attitude toward the Christians. The Madinan Qur'anic discourse on the Christians is more polemical and critical than the Makkan one, and occupies a large portion. Such discourse follows various tones between praise and criticism. However, the tone of the Madinan Qur'an demonstrates that the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and the Christians was much friendlier than the relationship with the Jews.²⁷⁶ This was obvious by the treatment of the Prophet Muhammad by the people of Najran and Abyssinia for the characteristics they possessed and the good deeds they performed. Al-Ṭabarī explained these Madinah passages and referred to the occasions of revelation and various narrations of other exegetes and scholars for the two types of discourses.

An example of the Madinan Qur'an that refers to that sense is in passages (Q 5:82-85).²⁷⁷ The address in these passages seems to be for the Prophet Muhammad who experienced hostility from the Jews and Pagans and found support and a positive attitude from the Christians of Abyssinia and other Christian leaders such as the Roman king and the Egyptian Coptic leader.²⁷⁸ Prophet Muhammad also sent friendly messages to the Negus of Abyssinia inviting him to Islam with wise words which reminded them of the common faith they have.²⁷⁹ Al-Ṭabarī refers to various narrations of occasions of revelation narrated by Ibn 'Abbās, Sa'īd Ibn Jubair, Mujāhid, Ibn Mas'ūd, Al-Suddī, Qatādah and 'Atā'. McAuliffe analysed the views of these exegetes

²⁷⁵ Az-Zarkashī, Badr Al-Dīn, *Al-Burhan fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Ma'rifah, 1972) vol. 4, p. 128,

²⁷⁶ See Parrinder, Geoffrey, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965, 1965) p. 160

²⁷⁷ 'You (Prophet) are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians...' (Q 5:82-85)

²⁷⁸ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 10, pp. 498-509)

²⁷⁹ Parrinder, Geoffrey, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965, 1965) pp. 160-163

in Al-Ṭabarī's commentary who referred to the various occasions of revelation for this positive discourse. Most of these views allude to the story of Negus of Abyssinia with Muslims and his delegation to the Prophet Muhammad. McAuliffe endeavours to analyse Al-Ṭabarī's theory in identifying such a group of Christians that the passage meant. She maintains that although various views are mentioned by the exegetes, the commentary of Al-Ṭabarī himself asserts that although the Qur'an does not name such a group of Christians for us, it might refer to the Negus Christian group; or it might refer to another group of Christians before Muhammad (pbuh), or after him.²⁸⁰ All these narrations related the kind stances of the Christians with Muhammad (pbuh). However, Al-Ṭabarī himself maintains that the passage refers to a group of Christians who were close in belief to Muhammad's beliefs, and he does not deny that the passage could refer to the leader of Abyssinia.²⁸¹

Other Madinan passages refer to similar discourse and meaning. This is shown in *Sūrah Al-Qaṣaṣ* (Q 28:52-54).²⁸² Al-Ṭabarī maintains that the passages here praise a group of the People of the Book from amongst the Jews and Christians who believed in the Torah or the Gospel, then believed in Muhammad and his message, therefore, they will receive a double reward from God.²⁸³

However, this does not mean that all Christians, their scholars, priests or monks were good to Muslims. There are other passages which describe Christians going astray and trying to convince others of embracing their faith (Q 9:34). Discourse of criticism to the Christians in the Qur'an returns to various reasons such as disobedience, disbelief, alteration of the scripture, denying Muhammad's prophethood, message of Islam, and the Qur'an (Q 2:105-107). Other passages of negative discourse mention other reasons such as the People of the Book becoming allies to each other against Muslims, and Muslims are therefore warned against taking such Christians and Jews as allies, as in: '*You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies (Awliyā') as they are allies only to each other...*' (Q 5:51). The term *Awliyā'*²⁸⁴ has

²⁸⁰ McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). pp. 205-208

²⁸¹ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 10, pp. 498-509), vol.10, pp. 449-502

²⁸² '*Those to whom We gave the Scripture before believe in it, and, when it is recited to them, say, 'We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord...' (28:52-54)*

²⁸³ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 19, p. 596

²⁸⁴ *Awliā'* refers to several meanings such as: supporters, helpers, righteous, and pious.

numerous meanings in Arabic, and in this context, it signifies allies or supporters. Al-Ṭabarī narrated that this passage was revealed when ‘Ubādah Ibn al-Ṣāmit abandoned his allies to the Jews after they demonstrated enmity to Islam, and ‘Abdullāh Ibn Ubayy Ibn Salūl insisted on keeping the ties with them.²⁸⁵ In his commentary on Q 2:120, Al-Ṭabarī believed that a group of the Jews and Christians would not be pleased with Muhammad’s message until he follows their way and adopts their religion, and maintains that it would be impossible that Muhammad would follow Judaism and Christianity because they disagreed with each other.²⁸⁶

Generally, it is evident in Al-Ṭabarī’s commentary that although the discourse of the Madinan Qur’an is more negative and polemical towards the Christians than the Makkan one, it can still be described as ambivalent and alternate between negative and positive. On some occasions, the discourse of the Madinan Qur’an shows that the relationship between Muslims and Christians was friendlier than the relationship with Jews. Moreover, it is often that the Qur’an uses words such as: *illā qalīlā* (except few of them), or *minhum* (some of them) to confirm that not all Christians are alike. It also mentions the bad and the good deeds of the Christians and puts them on a similar level with Jews and Muslims; urging them to come together with a common word, believe in one God, in His Scriptures, Messengers, follow their ways, and avoid polytheism; because God is One Who will judge among all on the Day of Judgment.²⁸⁷

3.3 Features of Positive Discourse on Christians

Various terms and designations are used to refer to Christians with explicit names such as *Naṣārā*, monks, and priests, and with implicit names such as ‘who follow you (Jesus)’ or ‘those to whom the book before (was revealed)’, or ‘the sinners’.²⁸⁸ Other various positive characteristics and qualities are attributed to the Christians in several passages. These include: submission to the will of God, respect to His revelation, that they do not sell the passages of God for a small price; and that they be steadfast,

²⁸⁵ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarir, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl ayil-Qur’an*, (Damascus: Mu’asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 10, pp. 96-97, 395

²⁸⁶ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarir, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl ayil-Qur’an*, (Damascus: Mu’asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.2, p. 562 and MS: Al-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 2 p. 319

²⁸⁷ Ayoub, Mahmoud, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, (New York, Orbis Books, 2007) p. 208

²⁸⁸ McAuliffe, J. Dammen, *Qur’anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 285

compassionate, merciful, and not arrogant. McAuliffe discusses the commentaries of the ten exegetes on the Madinan passage (Q 5:82-83) which praises a group of Christians and criticises a group of Jews. She concludes that most of these passages are part of the Madinan Qur'an demonstrating praise and respect to Christians. Some western scholars take the view that the Christians that the Qur'an praises do not exist nowadays, and that they only exist in the Muslim imagination, because the Christians that the Qur'an deals with are those who are true Christians who accepted Muhammad's message. The Qur'anic Christians are not part of the historical community. Therefore, the Qur'anic Nasara as mentioned in the exegetical tradition would not be known and recognizable to those who called themselves Christians.²⁸⁹ For Muslim scholars, the term Nasara extends to include all Christians who follow the Gospel and Jesus, even if they do not believe in the message of Islam.

Another feature of respect is the inviolability of the Christians' houses of worship, which include churches (Q 22:40)²⁹⁰ and condemnation of those who prevent the servants of God from worship, describing them as wrongdoers and threatening them with severe punishment on the Day of Judgement in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* (Q 2:114). Furthermore, the Qur'anic passage invites to confirmation and completeness of the divine Books i.e. the Torah and the Gospel, and it has not come to contradict or replace them (Q 3:3-4).²⁹¹ Another positive feature of this discourse is the general call to the People of the Book to agree on a common word of faith and worship One God, without associating any partners with Him (Q 3:64). In another passage, it calls for a fair dialogue with the People of the Book and confirms the belief in what was sent to us and what was sent to the Prophet (Q 29:46). This will be discussed more in the chapter about polemical discourse.²⁹² Among the positive features is that the Qur'an rejects the arrogant boasting by any of the followers of the three faiths (Q 4:123-124). The

²⁸⁹ Lewinstein, Keith. *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1992, pp. 195–196. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23063786.

²⁹⁰ Sūrat An-Nūr says, '*Shining out in houses of worship. God has ordained that they be raised high and that His name be remembered in them...*' (Q 24:36). Similar verse in Sūrah Al-Hajj says, '*...If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed...*' (Q 22:40)

²⁹¹ '*Step by step, He has sent the Scripture down to you (Prophet) with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel, earlier as a guide for people...*' (Q 3:3-4)

²⁹² Ayoub, Mahmoud, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, (New York, Orbis Books, 2007) p. 2-3.

criterion in the sight of God for His approval of people is belief and doing good deeds; not slogans, names, titles, or familial and tribal relations.²⁹³

The other feature of positivity in the Qur'anic tone can be noted in social dealings and interactions. The Qur'an removes the social obstacles with the Christians and allows for Muslims to eat their food and marry their women (Q 5:5)²⁹⁴ and also commands Muslims to argue and debate with them in the best of ways (Q 29:46). Another passage confirms that the Christians of Najran who sacrificed their life for faith are martyrs, and promises severe punishment for those who killed them by fire (Q 85:4-10). Al-Ṭabarī refers to various narrations of occasions of revelation and historical events about passages and differences of opinions about the identity of the people of *Ukhdūd* (i.e. ditch).²⁹⁵ The majority of opinions and narrations view that people of *Ukhdūd* are a group of believers from the Children of Israel or *Ahl Al-Kitāb*.²⁹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī alludes to other commentaries of other numerous exegetes who claim similar occasions of revelation and various narrations. However, most of them agree that this passage refers to a group of Christian people who were being forced and refused to give up their religion, for which they were thrown into the fire.²⁹⁷

The above passages aim to demonstrate the positive reflection and remarks of the Qur'an on Christians, and how Al-Ṭabarī interpreted these passages relying on the traditional statements and other exegetes' interpretations. They generally explained the reasons of such praise, that they are praised for doing good deeds, or for the good characteristics they possess, and are promised great reward in the Hereafter; that there is no fear or grief for them. These passages of positive discourse on Christians demonstrate their status in the Qur'an and their relationship with Muslims, as well as similarities between the persecution which occurred to the Christian people of the ditch and the persecution which occurred to Muslim migrants. God promised them great reward for their sacrifice and forbearance for the sake of belief.

²⁹³ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Tārīkh Al-Ṭabarī* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1967) vol. 9, pp. 228-248

²⁹⁴ 'The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste, believing, women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bride-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses.' (Q 5:5)

²⁹⁵ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Tārīkh Al-Ṭabarī* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1967) vol. 24, p. 337.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 337-342

²⁹⁷ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 342

3.4 Features of Negative Discourse on Christians

Al-Ṭabarī offered detailed interpretation to the passages which show the features of negative discourse and criticism to Christians and presented various reasons for this criticism which is repeated in various places of the Qur'an. Such criticism was not for social, racial, or political reasons, but for disobedience, breaking the law of God, or rejecting Islam, or the Qur'an, or Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), or issues related to God Himself and the status of Jesus (pbuh).²⁹⁸ *Sūrah Al-Mā'idah* is one of the main *Sūrahs* which gives negative detailed discourse on the Christians and refers to many reasons for such negative discourse (see Q 5:12-15). Similar to *Sūrah Al-Mā'idah*, *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* also gives a negative detailed discourse on Christians and criticises them for their hypocrisy, hiding the truth, changing their faith, and breaking the covenant of God (Q 2:75-79, and 3:187).

The other reasons for such negative discourse are due to other issues related to the status of Jesus. For instance, the 'Nazarenes' claim that Christ is the Son of God (Q 9:30-31) The Christian doctrine of the Trinity involves an association of creatures with God the Creator. Consequently, the Qur'anic passage places great emphasis on the humanity of Jesus, by saying, '*With God, Jesus is as Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him 'Be,' and he was*' (Q 3:59). The Qur'an categorises those who claim that the Messiah is the Son of God as disbelievers because they ignored his humanity and have this major claim. As those who say that Jesus is God's son, that he is God, or an associate with God in divinity. The Qur'an explicitly responds, '*They disbelieved who said God is the Messiah, Mary's son...*' (Q 5:17). Al-Ṭabarī explains that in relation to Jesus's divinity, not all the Jews and Christians claimed that 'Uzayr or Jesus is son of God, only some. Some Jews for instance claim that 'Uzayr is the son of God.²⁹⁹ He presented various and similar narrations about the identity of 'Uzayr and how and why some of the Jews elevated his status to divinity.³⁰⁰ In every faith, a few people have claimed special privileges or merit for themselves. There are, even among Muslims, those who claimed that they were prophets, as Musaylamah the liar did. The history of nations shows that people who disbelieved before—such as the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Persians—the Jews and the Christians were so

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., vol. 14, p. 202.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., vol.14, p. 202-205

influenced by their philosophies, superstitions, and fancies that they also invented erroneous creeds like theirs.³⁰¹ For this reason, they have been criticised.

Just like the Jews, Christians were criticised for their claim that Paradise is only for them and no one else will be admitted to it. *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* says, '*They also say, 'No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian...' (Q 2:111)*. Al-Ṭabarī maintains that this does not mean that they agree that both will only enter Paradise, but it means that Jews claim, only they will enter Paradise, and Christians claim, only they will enter Paradise.³⁰² They both (group of rabbis and group of Christians of Najran) disputed on this issue before the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was in Makkah.³⁰³ Then, the critical response came directly to tell them that the measure for entering paradise is the belief and good deeds in the following passage: '*In fact, any who explicit themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve*' (Q 2:112). A similar passage to this is confirmed in *Sūrah Al-Mā'idah* where they both claim they are the children of God and His loved ones (Q 5:18).³⁰⁴

Another passage of negative discourse is to be noted in Q 2:135 in which Christians, like Jews, claim that their religion is the right way to God. The discourse in that passage comes in the form of a request and response: statements from Jews and Christians to the Prophet Muhammad and an answer from God to that statement. The phrase 'they say' means that Jews say, 'be Jews', and Christians say, 'be Christians.' Each sees the good in his way. The Qur'an, which generally refers to four groups: Jews, Christians, unbelievers, and believers (Muslims) rejects this claim. The address in the passage is directed from Jews and Christians to the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Both asked Muslims to adopt their faith for this would guide them to the right way. The response to that statement is to reject that claim and follow

³⁰¹ Mawdudi, Abul A'la, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1990), p. 203)

³⁰² MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarir, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 2, p. 507.

³⁰³ Ibid., vol. 2 p. 514

³⁰⁴ *The Jews and the Christians say, 'We are the children of God and His beloved ones.'* Say, '*Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation: He forgives whoever He will and punishes whoever He will.*' (Q 5:18)

Abraham's way (*Ḥanifiyyah*).³⁰⁵ Making that claim while ignoring Abraham's way is the reason for criticism in the passage.³⁰⁶

Like the Jews, the Christians are criticised for the claim that Abraham was Christian. *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān* says, 'Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and devoted to God, never an Idolater' (Q 3:67). Similar passages are noted in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, '... Or are you saying that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians?' (Prophet), ask them, 'Who knows better: you or God?...' (Q 2:140).³⁰⁷ The Jews claim that former messengers and prophets such as Abraham and his ancestors were Jewish and Christians. The response is the refusal to that claim and confirmation of *Ḥanifiyyah* to Abraham (pbuh). In another passage, the response is to ask them to bring their proofs and evidences (*hātū burhānakum*) for those claims (Q 2:111). The negative discourse in this text is due to the claim from each side that Abraham and his offspring were of Jewish or Christian descent.³⁰⁸

The other passages of negative discourse are that the Jews and Christians would never be pleased with the Prophet Muhammad and the message of Islam unless he follows their beliefs and ways (Q 2:120).³⁰⁹ A similar idea is also noted in the following text: 'Be a Jew or Christian, and you would be rightly guided...' (Q 2:135). Whatever you do for them, they will not accept it. Al-Ṭabarī gives comprehensive explanation in terms of language, historical contexts, and exegesis. According to him, the *Ḥanifiyyah* (monotheism) is the common belief for all faiths and religions which should be followed.³¹⁰ Therefore, God revealed this passage to warn Muhammad against such tricks and to inform him that even if you comply with their request they will not be pleased.

The other feature of negative discourse is the warning given to Muslims against following Jews and Christians, taking them as allies and not to seeking guidance from

³⁰⁵ *Ḥanifiyyah* is the belief in monotheism and Hanif refers to a believer who is neither a polytheist (*mushrik*) nor a Jew or a Christian.

Exegetes of the Qur'an say that *Ḥanifiyyah* signifies monotheism or adhering to the religion of Abraham.

³⁰⁶ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 3, p. 101) and MS: Al-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 2, p. 370

³⁰⁷ Fatoohi, Louay, *The Mystery of the Historical Jesus, the Messiah in the Qur'an, the Bible, and Historical Sources*, (UK: Luna Plena Publishing, 2009) pp. 710-713

³⁰⁸ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 6, p. 493

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 713

³¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 102

them (Q 5:51).³¹¹ The apparent reason for this warning in this negative discourse is that they are *awliyā'* (supporters) to each other, they are not supporters to Muslims.³¹² The question that arises here is, why does the Qur'an say that they are supporters of each other, but in another passage (Q 2:113) it mentions that they are against each other. How can this obvious contradiction be solved? The two texts are not contradictory because the Jews and Christians disagreed on many issues. However, they support each other and share one aim and agreement such as hostility to the message of Islam. The Qur'an also refers that hostility of Jews and Christians is not only directed towards Muslims, but also towards each other (Q 2:113). They disagree on Jesus's position, whether he was the messiah or God's messenger, and accused each other of going astray (Q 5:12-15).

A similar conveyance of negative discourse can be found in various *Sūrah*s where the Children of Israel break the covenants that God made with them. *Sūrah Al-Mā'idah* for instance, which refers to God promising to admit them into paradise if they follow his teachings (Q 5:12).³¹³ The nature of this covenant is mentioned in many other passages. All the passages Q 2:83, 2:93, 3:187, 4:154, 7:169, 4:175, 5:70-78 demonstrate that they broke the covenant when they refused to believe in His messengers including Jesus (Q 4:175, 5:70, 5:78). God also made covenants with Christians, but they too forgot some of what they were told to remember... (Q 5:14). Similarly, they did not fulfil the commandment to support the last prophet whom Jesus told them about (Q 61:6).

According to the Qur'an, these people in question are the polytheists who thought that God had offspring—the Christians. They have exposed themselves to the charge of disbelief. The passage mentions, '*They have become infidels who say that God is one of three*' (5:73). The 'one of three' with whom this passage claims the Christians wrongfully identify God is, as the text itself goes on to make clear, Jesus the Messiah (Q 5:75).

³¹¹ *You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies, they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them— God does not guide such wrongdoers. (Q 5:51)*

³¹² MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol.10, p. 396

³¹³ Ibid., pp. 109-110, and MS: Al-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 6, pp. 12-14

To conclude, it has been noted from the above mentioned passages that criticism to the Children of Israel is mainly maintained in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, *Āl 'Imrān*, *Al-Nisā'*, and *Al-Mā'idah*. Other various passages demonstrate the negative features of the attitude to *Banī Isrā'īl* and mention various reasons for it. These include following their own whims and desires (Q 5:49, 28:50); ³¹⁴ not wishing any good for Muslims (Q 2:105); envy and hate toward Muslims (Q 2:109, 5:59); aggression and injustice they committed (Q 3:19); wishing misguidance for Muslims and hiding the truth (Q 3:70-73, 4:44); fighting against Muslims so that they can follow their whims and desires and leave their faith (Q 2:217); breaking covenants and treaties (Q 2:99-101, 9:8); wishing to extinguish the light of God with their mouths (Q 9:32); asking for more miracles, books, and signs (Q 4:153-159); disbelieving, hurting, or killing messengers (Q 2:84-86); loving life and hating death (Q 2:96); belief that the Hereafter belongs solely to them (Q 2:94-95); and asking many questions and making various requests (Q 2:108).

Al-Ṭabarī's view is that the pronoun 'they' in all previous passages refers to the People of the Book, Jews and Christians, as well as disbelievers in the Prophet Muhammad or his message. It does not mean that all of them claim these things against Islam and Muslims, just some or a few groups. It can be noted here that the Qur'an adopted a balanced discourse comprising of negative, positive and polemical remarks towards Christians. It praises the groups who did good deeds and followed the teachings of Jesus and the Gospel.³¹⁵ It also criticises the groups who deviated from the right way and followed their whims and desires. It also argues with them about religious and theological matters. There is no contradiction between the texts which praise the first group and the texts which criticise the second because they are two different groups. The other point which can be noted in most of the previous texts is that the negative discourse is directed to some groups of the Jews or some groups of the Christians or to both. The Qur'anic discourse is explicit in depicting the belief in the hearts of those who classify themselves as Christians. Those who follow their scripture and preserve the monotheistic teachings of Jesus are praised, and those who have either abandoned or perverted the actual teachings of Jesus, are admonished and warned by God.

³¹⁴Adil, Nouredin, *Mujādalat Ahl Al-Kitāb fī Al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah*, (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2007) p. 170-180

³¹⁵ Al-Kharashi, Suleiman, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Kitāb*, (Riyadh: Dar al-Tawheed lil-nashr, no date) p. 17-18.

4. CHAPTER FOUR

The Implicit Discourse of the Qur'an on the Christians

Introduction

The implicit discourse on Christians in the Qur'an appears through the sacred symbols and revered figures of Christianity, i.e. the discourse present in their Book, such as the Gospel, Mary, Jesus, churches, and religious leaders. Al-Ṭabarī explained several passages that offer detailed arguments concerning these symbols and figures, whilst addressing Christians through them. One example of such address is found in *Sūrah Al-Ṣaff* which reads, '*Jesus, son of Mary, said, 'Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad...*' (Q 61:6). The discourse in this passage refers to two important terms used by Jesus: *muṣaddiq* and *mubashshir* which mean confirming the former message i.e. Judaism and bringing good news of the next message i.e. Islam. In regard to this, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is noted to have said 'I am the (result of the) invocation made to God by my father Abraham.'³¹⁶ and the good news 'Īsā delivered...'.³¹⁷ Jesus addressed the Children of Israel and informed them of these matters as Moses did in a previous passage (Q 61:5) in the same *Sūrah*. This will be discussed in detail in the Qur'anic discourse on Jesus (pbuh). This chapter will particularly investigate the implicit discourse on the sacred symbols and key figures of Christianity, which includes positive discourse on monasteries and churches, the religious leaders i.e. monks and priests, all of whom have been mentioned briefly in the Qur'an and are addressed with fluctuating attitude (Q 57:27, 5:85, 9:34). Such passages indicate that both the People of the Book and Muslims are being addressed.³¹⁸ This implicit discourse also appears through the Gospel and its teachings in various *Sūrahs* of the Qur'an such as *Sūrahs Āl 'Imrān*, *Al-Mā'idah*, *Al-A'rāf*, and *Al-Tawbah* (Q 5:46-47, 7:157). The passage Q 7:157 also demonstrates the implicit discourse on the Christians and foretold the prophecy and characteristics of the unlettered prophet who will come later. The implicit passages also abrogated

³¹⁶ See the reference in (Q 2:129)

³¹⁷ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 23, p. 358

³¹⁸ Ibid., vol.14, p. 227

commandments laid out in the previous scriptures, for the Gospel abrogated some rules of the Torah, whereby Jesus was commanded to allow matters which were forbidden to *Banī Isrāʾīl* by Moses (Q 3:50).³¹⁹

Furthermore, the implicit discourse also contains argumentation and debate in relation to various religious issues, which are addressed in depth in the Qurʾan. This type of argumentative discourse appears in a positive form and is occasionally critical. Such implicit discourse will be discussed and examined in the shade of the classical exegete, Al-Ṭabarī with particular mention of his interpretation of these passages. Al-Ṭabarī gives explanation to such passages which demonstrate and highlight the positive reflection that the Qurʾanic discourse portrays and uses towards Jesus, Mary, the Gospel, monasteries, and churches, yet takes a varied attitude towards priests, monks, and all Christians in general.

4.1. Jesus

Al-Ṭabarī explained in his commentary on passage Q 61:6 that the Messiah, the son of Mary, God's Messenger and Prophet, like Moses before him, was sent to his own people, the Israelites in order to confirm the authenticity of the Torah.³²⁰ In another passage, the Qurʾān speaks of the Son of Mary as a servant and human (ʿabd), whom We graced and made an example (mathalan) to the Israelites.³²¹

To begin with, the Qurʾanic discourse on Jesus is clearly more polemical in the Madinan *Sūrah*s compared to the Makkan ones. It reveals that the human soul with all its faith and love is reflected in Jesus's life, who is honoured in various passages (Q 3:45).³²² Al-Ṭabarī like other classical and modern exegetes demonstrates in his exegetical methodology a positive tone on scriptures, messengers, and places of worship of all faiths. It is evident to see this positive tone when the Qurʾan describes these symbols and figures with various honourable titles such as a sign, a mercy, as an example, and a witness. Jesus is honoured with titles in the Qurʾan such as Christ,

³¹⁹ Ibid., vol. 23, p. 359,

³²⁰ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 161

³²¹ Griffith, Sidney H. "The Qurʾan's 'Nazarenes' and Other Late Antique Christians: Arabic-Speaking 'Gospel People' in Qurʾanic Perspective²." *Christsein in Der Islamischen Welt: Festschrift Für Martin Tamcke Zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by Sidney H. Griffith and Sven Grebenstein, 1st ed., Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2015, pp. 81–106. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc77120.9.

³²² Ayoub, Mahmoud, *A Muslim View of Christianity: An Essay on Dialogue*, (New York, Orbis Books, 2007), p. 23

Messiah, Word of God, Jesus, Messenger, Prophet, and Son of Mary.³²³ Al-Ṭabarī does not provide much detail for the origin of Jesus's names, but he refers to statements that say he was given this name because 'he was bestowed with blessing.³²⁴

The most common name used in the Qur'an is *ʾĪsā* which occurs twenty five times (Q 2:136, 3:52, 55, 59, 84; 4:163; 7:85; 42:13; 43:63; 2:87, 253; 3:45; 4:157, 171; 5:46, 78, 110, 112, 114, 116; 19:34; 33:7; 57:27; 61:6, 14).³²⁵ Neal Robinson discussed in detail the Qur'anic discourse on the narrative and material of Jesus, and the origin of his name, which is mentioned in the Qur'an more than the Prophet Muhammad's, peace be upon them both. Although the Qur'an refers to the Prophet Muhammad as an ideal character for Muslims (Q 6:161-163, 39:11-12), it refers to Jesus in detailed passages, about his birth, mother, miracles, companions, and character. It clearly denies the claim that Jesus is God or the son of God (see Q 5:17, 72, 116; 9:30) and affirms that he is a servant of God and a human who is required to eat, drink, walk in markets, pray, fast, and give in charity (see Q 4:172, 19:30, 5:75, 43:59, 19:30). However, he is a mercy, prophet, and messenger from God to the world (Q 19:21-30, 3:49-53, 4:171, 5:75, 61:6). God taught him the Torah, and made him a sign to all mankind and a messenger to the Children of Israel (Q 3:49, 43:59). He also supported him with Gabriel (the Holy Spirit) and the Gospel, in which God allowed for the Children of Israel what was previously forbidden (Q 2:87, 3:48-50, 5:46) and clarified some of the issues they disagreed on (Q 43:63).³²⁶ Many passages in the Qur'an also refer to miracles given to Jesus to support him (as He did with all other prophets and messengers) such as raising the deceased, creating birds from clay, curing the blind and the leper, informing the people what they ate and stored in their homes (Q 3:49, 5:110).³²⁷ The purpose of narrating Jesus's story in many passages was to reiterate that his miracles were signs from God, not a divine status which he holds nor

³²³ Parrinder, Geoffrey, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965, 1965) pp. 16-17, and See MS: Al-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 4, p. 194 and pp. 208-209, see MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 9, p. 417

³²⁴ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 6, p. 415

³²⁵ Robinson, Neal. 'Jesus.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 27 October 2013 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/jesus-COM_00099

³²⁶ Ibid

³²⁷ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 3, p. 423, and vol. 11, p. 212,

supernatural powers which he self-acquired (Q 5:110, 61:6). However, some polemical texts in the Qur'an are not easy to understand and Muslim exegetes find it hard to interpret it for many reasons, such as the ambiguity of the language, syntax and theological implications. Sayyed Quṭb for example in his commentary on passages related to Jesus's death, considers these verses amongst the unclear verses (*mutashabihāt*) whose correct meaning is only known by God.³²⁸

Jesus is also mentioned in the compilations of *ḥadīths* (In the compilations of all of: Al-Bukhārī (d. 870), Muslim (d. 875 CE), Abū Dāwūd (d. 888CE), Ibn Mājah (d. 886 CE), Al-Tirmidhī (d. 892), and Al-Nasā'ī (d. 916 CE)).³²⁹ The portrayal of Jesus in these *ḥadīths* is centred around the statements which explain the relationship between him and the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the descriptions of what Jesus looked like, his return, and his miracles and merits. It is narrated in one of these statements that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, 'Prophets are brothers (in faith), but have different mothers. However, their religion is one. I am the nearest of all to Jesus the son of Mary as there is not a prophet between me and him.'³³⁰

The narrative of Jesus in the Qur'an has been studied by many scholars from the East and West. Since the nineteenth century, Western scholars contributed much to the study of Jesus from the Islamic perspective. They discussed the thematic approach with which he is portrayed, such as Geoffrey Parrinder in his book *Jesus in the Qur'an*; while others discussed the structural analysis, and the purpose of discourse, such as the centrality of monotheism and negation of sonship.³³¹ These studies and publications include those of Gerock (1839 CE), Manneval (1867 CE), Rösch (1876 CE), Samuel Zwemer (1912 CE), J. Robson (1930 CE), Michel Hayek, Geoffrey Parrinder (1965 CE), the German scholar Olaf Schuman, Christine Schirmacher (1992 CE), Heikki Raisanen (1971 CE), Claus Schedl 1978 CE), Gunther Risse (1989 CE), Neal Robinson (1991 CE), and Mona Siddiqi. Kenneth Cragg, a prolific writer on Muslim-Christian dialogue, published a book in 1985 about Jesus, Prophet

³²⁸ Mourad, Suleiman A. "The Death of Jesus in Islam: Reality, Assumptions, and Implications." *Engaging the Passion: Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, edited by Oliver Larry Yarbrough, Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, Minneapolis, 2015, pp. 359–382. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13wwwjn.30.

³²⁹ The six collections, or compilations of *ḥadīths* (Traditions of Prophet Muhammad) are: Al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dawūd, Al-Tirmidhī, Al-Nasā'ī, and Ibn Mājah.

³³⁰ Lervik, Oddbjørn, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, (Swedish Institute Missionary Research, Uppsala, 1999), pp. 30-31.

³³¹ Ibid.

Muhammad and the Christians.³³² Most of these studies are thematic in their approach. It is necessary to study this discourse from a contextual approach and to focus not only on the external and historical context, but also on the internal frame of Christ in the Qur'an. These studies ignore important subject matters, such as *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* or *al-Nāsikh* and *Mansūkh* (i.e. abrogation), which demonstrate the objectives and circumstances of the Qur'anic discourse, aiding to understand the meaning in the correct context. Many Muslim scholars have also written on Jesus in the Qur'an from different perspectives. These writings are comparative such as *Al-Masīḥ fī al-Qur'ān wa al-Tawrah wa al-Injīl* (Jesus in the Qur'an, Torah, and in the Gospel) by Abdil-Karim al-Khatib (d. 1985 CE), and *Al-Ikhtiyār baina Al-Islam wa Al-Masīḥiyyah* (The Choice between Islam and Christianity) by Ahmad Deedat (d. 2005 CE). Some writings are narratives, such as *'Īsa wa Maryam fī al-Qur'an wa al-Tafāsīr* (Jesus and Maryam in the Qur'an and Exegeses) published by the Royal Institute for Religious Studies in Jordan.

One of Jesus's missions in the Qur'anic discourse is to furnish and provide the link between Judaism and Islam. He was sent to the Jews to confirm to them the authenticity of the Torah and was delegated with the announcement of the advent of a new prophet and message. The implicit Qur'anic discourse on Jesus demonstrates refutation to the polemical issues pertaining to his status, and relationship with the Children of Israel, and reflect the Qur'anic portrayal towards the sacred symbols and revered figures of Christianity.

4.2. Mary

Mary (Maryam), the mother of Jesus, is another key figure in the Christian and Islamic doctrine. The Qur'an refers to Mary's name thirty-four times, in comparison to the New Testament, which refers to her nineteen times. This name comes originally from Hebrew and Aramaic and no evidence proves the use of this name among Arabs before Islam.³³³ Al-Ṭabarī maintains that she is the only woman whose name is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. The Qur'an does mention many other women, but not by name. For example: Eve; the wives of Noah, Lot, Abraham, Zachariah, the Egyptian governor, and Pharaoh; the mother of Moses and his sister; the Queen of

³³² Ibid., pp. 13-15.

³³³ Parrinder, Geoffrey, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965) pp. 60-61.

Sheba (*Bilqīs*); and the *Mujādilah* (the disputer) who complained to the Prophet.³³⁴ The Qur'anic discourse on Mary and other sacred symbols takes the shape of positive tone.

The polemics between Christians and Muslims on the status of Mary is less than the polemics between the Christians themselves on Jesus. They both agree that she is the virginal mother of Jesus; however, they disagree about her status, in Islam she is revered, but not the mother of God as some group of Christianity claims, nor the one who gave birth to the one who is God.³³⁵ Maryam's narrative in the Qur'an is an example of purity, obedience, virtue and righteousness (Q 66:12). All of this comes to the fore when she is told she will give birth to a child who will be a 'mercy from God', Jesus who is known as the Spirit of God.³³⁶ Her story is mentioned in three Makkan *Sūrahs*: Maryam (Q 19:16-24), *Al-Anbiyā'* (Q 21:91), and *Al-Mu'minūn* (23). She is also mentioned in four Madinan *Sūrahs*: *Āl 'Imrān* (Q 3:33-47), *Al-Nisā'* (Q 4:156), *Al-Mā'idah*, and *Al-Taḥrīm* (Q 66:12). The scholars refer to the wisdom of mentioning her name, which was to negate the claim of those who say that God has a wife and a son. Therefore, the Qur'an always ascribes Jesus (*'Isā*) to his mother in various passages because he had no father and to negate the claim that he is the son of God.³³⁷ *Sūrah Al-Nisā'* for instance negates that claim clearly: '*...And because they disbelieved and uttered a terrible slander against Mary...*' Both these points appear simultaneously in the same passage.

The Christian doctrine of the divinity of Christ in passages (Q 72 to 75) is rejected. The nature of the Messiah is clear from the indications given in these passages; he was merely a human being. He was one born from the womb of a woman, who had a known genealogy, who possessed a physical body, who was subject to all the limitations of a human being and who had all the attributes characteristic of human beings. Similarly, Mary is portrayed as a human, too. She endured labour pains and gave birth naturally as any other woman. However, her nobility and pure characteristics are unmatched, a reputation the Qur'an clearly preserved. Affirming her own humanity and that of her

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Siddiqui, Mona. "Front Matter." *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*, Yale University Press, 2013, pp. i-v. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bxdr.1.

³³⁶ "Reflections on Mary." *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*, by Mona Siddiqui, Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 149–170. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bxdr.8.

³³⁷ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 6, p. 413, 4

son Jesus, both are defended against the heinous claims against them by their followers. The central aim of these passages concerning them, is to argue the point of view that God is One and without a partner. The point of the miracles performed through them has been completely missed by the Christians (Q 4:171, 5:116).

Al-Ṭabarī demonstrated that these passages and others further reiterate the human nature of Jesus and his mother Mary. The supernatural miracles that God gave Mary and Jesus do not change their position as human beings.³³⁸ This can be noticed in other passages in which God links them both with Adam (see Q 3:59) in order to demonstrate that, just as Adam was created with no father and mother, so was Jesus created from a mother without a father. The creation of Jesus is not more supernatural than the creation of Adam who was created with no father or mother; however, no religious group has claimed that Adam is the son of God. It is God Who said, 'Be', and he was.³³⁹

It is evident that the image of Mary in the Qur'anic discourse is the prototype of an independent woman. At an early age she had a spiritual bond with God, similar to that of prophets; and she charts her own way in this bond. She does unusual things for her sex and for her time. For instance, she withdraws from society and, to a degree, from her family. In the beginning, she also resists the angel that appears to her and announces the Creator's will to her about having a child without a male partner, speaks with the angel and, trusting in God, eventually agrees. She understands full well that ideas about marriage and a woman's role at the time mean that she might pay with her life for the birth of a child she has not conceived by her husband. She also copes with giving birth alone and gives some sense, through her words, of how hard this must have been. But even so her trust in God remains steadfast, as it does when she comes back to her community. Things initially happen as she had expected they would. She is attacked and comes close to being condemned. Again she trusts in God, and the newborn child speaks out and rescues her. This miracle rescues her, as it convinces her family that divine will is at work. All of this takes great courage.³⁴⁰

³³⁸ Ibid., vol. 9, p. 419

³³⁹ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 468,

³⁴⁰ "Mary, God's Chosen One." *Christmas and the Qur'an*, by KARL-JOSEF KUSCHEL, Gingko, London, 2017, pp. 70–99. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv5vddnz.8.

4.3. The Gospel

Unlike the fluctuating discourse on the followers of Jesus, the Qur'anic discourse on the *Injīl* and all other divine Scriptures remains positive and describes it as a Book of guidance and light. The term *Injīl* is repeated mainly in the Madinan Qur'an except in a few passages (Q 7:156-157). These are recorded as late Makkan revelation. Al-Ṭabarī maintains that the term *Injīl* always refers to the revelation to Christians, like the term *Tawrah* which refers to the revelation to Jews. The terms Old Testament (i.e. Torah which contains five books) and New Testament (i.e. Bible which contains four books) do not exist in the Qur'an; they are used by the Jews and Christians.³⁴¹ In recent decades, the Christian scripture has included the works produced by several different writers and is written in different languages; the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. Aramaic is also used for some of these scriptures.³⁴² Gabriel Said Reynolds views that the Qur'an is perhaps employing the term Torah to refer to the Hebrew Bible and *Injīl* to the New Testament or the Christians scripture (Q 5:47, 7:157). The Bible in modern times is known as two parts, the Old and New Testament, in which the Hebrew scripture is considered to be as the Word of God included in the Bible.³⁴³

Qur'anic statements relating Jesus to his followers provide more examples of this pattern of exegetical specification. Referring to his followers in general, commentators have characterised Jesus's followers as believers. Of course, this is predicated on the distinction between true and false followers. When Muhammad came, those who did not submit were no longer true followers of Jesus either. But those who were adherents to Jesus's true message—the authentic, Qur'anic Christians—welcomed Muhammad and submitted to him. They embraced the unadulterated version of the *Injīl*, and were already considered to be in an intermediate stage to Islam. They are praised for accepting Muhammad's message even in the face of potential retaliation and alienation from their ex-coreligionists and are promised a double divine reward.

³⁴¹ Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990), vol. 3, p 129

³⁴² Goddard, Hugh, *Christians and Muslims from Double Standard to Mutual Understanding*, (London: Routledge Curzon, 1995), p 35.

³⁴³ Reynolds, Gabriel Said, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (London: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 1

Underpinning the aforementioned narrative is the Muslim idea that the Qur'an is the Divine's most recent and final revelation. In this regard, textual alteration of the *Injīl* is a central tenet of the Qur'an. However, the Qur'an also asserts that the *Injīl* carries within it a reference to the advent of Muhammad. To this extent, some Muslim commentators maintain the *Injīl* retains sufficient elements within itself as to allow unbiased Christians to spiritually progress to the message of Muhammad.

The term *Injīl* in the Qur'an is not Arabic but of Greek origin, which means the good news or glad tidings.³⁴⁴ In his book, '*Jesus in the Qur'an*', Parrinder (d. 2005 CE) views that the origin of the term is debated; whether it came from Arabic, Syriac, or Abyssinian.³⁴⁵ In several passages, Jesus confirms what was revealed before him in the Torah (Q 3:48, 5:110, 5:46, 57:27). In his commentary on these passages, Al-Ṭabarī maintains that the Qur'an was revealed to confirm the authenticity of these Books, and this proves the authenticity of the Qur'an itself, which authenticates the previous divine Books because the source of revelation is One God. They also add that if the Qur'an was not authentic, it would not authenticate the previous divine Books.³⁴⁶

The Bible that is claimed by Christians as the original *Injīl* is debated by Muslim scholars. According to the majority of Christians, the Bible was recorded under the divine inspiration by the four evangelists in the four canonical books i.e. the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. All these texts were written in Greek. The differences between the Christian and Muslim views on the Gospel soon gave rise to the charge that Christians have distorted (committed *Tahrīf*) the original text of the Gospel.³⁴⁷ Muslim scholars differ about the type of corruption of the Torah and Gospel. Some scholars, such as Al-Bairūnī (d. 1047-8 CE), view that the Jews and Christians made changes to the text of the Gospel; while Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE) views that they incorrectly interpreted it. So, the word *Tahrīf* may have two meanings, one is to change the word of God and the second to incorrectly interpret it.³⁴⁸ It is argued by Al-Bukhārī

³⁴⁴ Parrinder, Geoffrey, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965) p.142-144

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 6, p. 160

³⁴⁷ Griffith, Sidney H., 'Gospel,' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, , University of Exeter. 30 January 2014, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-Quran/gospel-SIM_00177

³⁴⁸ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol, 6, p. 535

in relation to passage (Q 3:78) that Muslim exegetes fall prey to this misconduct as well.³⁴⁹ Regardless of the differences in the definition of the term *Tahriṭ*, the term is repeated in four places in the Qur'an (Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13, 5:41). In these passages, it is not clear if *Tahriṭ* comprises the whole scripture or just certain passages of the text. The passages also do not refer to the time or place of this *Tahriṭ*, i.e. where and when this *Tahriṭ* occurred.³⁵⁰ It may be referring to the Jews of Madinah who made some changes to the Torah during the Prophet Muhammad's era, or perhaps during another era.

Gabriel Said Reynolds view is that in the early era of Islam, Muslim scholars faced the challenge of whether to consider the Jewish-Christian scriptures as authoritative, even in some passages of the Qur'an authority is given to the Christian scriptures (Q 10:94); similarly in other passages the Qur'an makes the point, that these scriptures have been distorted. Consequently, the early Islamic scholars deemed both Jewish and Christian scriptures unauthorised.³⁵¹ This has consequences on the ways in which Muslim exegetes would view the Gospel and Torah. Historically they have categorised these as *Isrā'īliyyāt* (narrations from the previous scriptures) which are found in classical *Tafsīr*.³⁵²

Gabriel Said Reynolds maintains that the Gospel that the Qur'an confirms is not the Gospel recollected in writing in the gospels according to the four New Testament evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—as Christians encountered it at the time of the Qur'an's delivery.³⁵³ Seventh-century Christians were, of course, accustomed to the idea of the one Gospel of Jesus the Messiah as recorded in writing in the four gospels of the evangelists, which is why they spoke of the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Since the Qur'an's evocation of the Gospel is not textual but oral, it is not surprising that it does not mention the Gospel. However, it was on its own recognizance, and given its own distinctive prophetology, that the Qur'an then

³⁴⁹ Parrinder, Geoffrey, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965, 1965) p. 146-147

³⁵⁰ MS: Al-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 5, p. 221

³⁵¹ Reynolds, Gabriel Said, *The Qur'an and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (London: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 1

³⁵² Ibid., p.2

³⁵³ Griffith, Sidney H. "The Bible in the Qur'an; the Qur'an in the Bible: Scriptural Intertextuality in the Language of Islam." *Books and Readers in the Premodern World: Essays in Honor of Harry Gamble*, edited by Karl Shuve, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2018, pp. 137–170. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.cdb2hnsqz.11.

speaks of the Gospel as a “scripture” (*Kitāb*) that God sent down to Jesus the Messiah, on the model of the Torah for Moses before him, and of the Qur’an for Muhammad after him. The Qur’an mentions the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an as on a par with one another in Q 9:111.³⁵⁴

4.4. Monasteries and Churches

The discourse on Christian place of worship i.e. churches and monasteries is repeated in a few passages of the Qur’an. It describes these places as sacred and under God’s protection. In the early Islamic period, both Muslims and Christians regularly used the word *Kanīṣah* to mean church. Although the word for church does not appear in the Qur’an, there is one passage that has been interpreted as referring to churches. God says, ‘...If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, *biya’* (i.e. churches), synagogues, and mosques, where God’s name is much invoked, would have been destroyed...’ (Q 22:40) The Qur’an uses the word *biya’* interpreted to refer to churches and the word *ṣawāmi’* which means monasteries. Al-Ṭabarī relates various interpretations of other exegetes confirming that *ṣawāmi’* refers to monasteries of priests and monks, and the word *biya’* refers to churches and *Ṣalawāt* refers to the synagogues of the Jews.³⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī quoted various interpretations of other exegetes such as Ibn Juraij and Mujāhid for the meaning of the passage. He also used the narration of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib concerning the occasion of revelation and the historical context of the passage.³⁵⁶ He maintains that the passage means, if God did not repel some people by means of others, these places of worship for Christians, Jews, and Muslims would have been destroyed.³⁵⁷ The protection and status are indications to the importance of these places, where God’s name is much invoked. It can be noted from that the discourse on Christian places of worship it is to be described as positive and considers all places as sacred. It is also evident that the Qur’an put them all in order and on the same level; and refers to the reason for this sanctity—God’s name—which is mentioned in there. Another passage demonstrating the positive discourse regarding such places is: ‘(God’s Light is) shining out in houses of worship. God has ordained that they be raised high and that His name be remembered in them

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl ayil-Qur’an*, (Damascus: Mu’asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 18, pp. 649-650

³⁵⁶ ibid., vol. 18, p. 647

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

...’ (Q 24:36). In his commentary on this passage, Al-Ṭabarī explains that the houses in this context refer to the mosques, and most of the scholars whom he cited confirmed the same meaning. Here, again, it is emphasised that the reason for their importance is that they are used for the worship of God and His praise and remembrance, and that they are places used to educate the believers and elevate their status.³⁵⁸

4.5. Monks and Priests

Unlike the discourse on the Gospel, Jesus, Mary, and places of worship, the Qur’an adopts an ambivalent tone when addressing monks (i.e. *ruhbān*) and priests (i.e. *qissīsīn*). The term *ruhbān* is mentioned three times (Q 5:82, 9:31, 34) and *rahbāniyyah* (monasticism) once in Q 57:27. One of the reasons why Muslims find Christians closest in affection towards them is due to some of their priests and monks. They are humble and not arrogant, ‘...*the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ for there are among them people devoted to learning and asceticism. These people are not given to arrogance.*’ (Q 5:82).³⁵⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, after referring to various narrations about the intended meaning in the text, views that it is a description of a community of the Christians who are closer in affection to Muslims. According to him, God does not name them, however, it might refer to the Abyssinian Christians or to any other community or group.³⁶⁰

By contrast, in another passage of the same *Sūrah*, the attitude towards monks and priests seems different. The text states, ‘*Believers, many rabbis and monks wrongfully consume people’s possessions and turn people away from God’s path...*’ (Q 9:34). This passage refers to a group of monks and rabbis who take people’s wealth with no right. The passage also confirms that there are truthful and honest rabbis and monks. Similar to the aforementioned passage, this one also demonstrates the negligence displayed by them in following the right way of the Torah and the Gospel, they did this by consuming wealth through unlawful means or took bribes to change the teachings of the Torah and Gospel to serve the interests of some people.³⁶¹ Al-Rāzī refers other interpretations, most of which deal with the ways these monks operated to accumulate

³⁵⁸ Ibid., vol. 19, p. 189

³⁵⁹ Ibid., vol. 10, pp. 502-506

³⁶⁰ Ibid., vol. 10, p. 502

³⁶¹ Ibid., vol. 8, p. 7

the wealth of people.³⁶² This text maintains that there are types of religious leaders who are guilty of two sins. First, they devour the wealth of the common folk by selling false decrees, and by taking bribes, gifts, and presents on different pretexts. Also, they invent religious rules and rituals as temptation for people to buy their salvations and fortunes in life. The second sin is that they lead people away from the right path.³⁶³

In a third passage in *Sūrah Al-Tawbah* (Q 9:31), the Qur'an asserts a different attitude. For example: '*They take their rabbis and their monks as lords, as well as Christ, the son of Mary...*' (Q 9:31). Here, the reason for criticising the monks and priests is for their negligence of the rules of the Torah and Gospel and instead following the monks and rabbis who prohibited what was allowed for them (Christians and Jews) and allowing the prohibited.³⁶⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, referring to the occasion of revelation, commented on this passage saying that 'Adī Ibn Ḥātim went to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) wearing a silver cross around his neck. Prophet Muhammad recited the following passage: '*They take their rabbis and their monks as lords...*' 'Adī commented, 'I said, 'They did not worship them.' Prophet Muhammad said, 'Yes they did. They (rabbis and monks) prohibited what was allowed for them (Christians and Jews) and allowed the prohibited, and they obeyed them. This is how they worshipped them'.³⁶⁵ Misguidance of the priests and monks and blind obedience of followers are the main reason for this criticism in this discourse.

This varied tone towards the followers and religious leaders of Christianity can be seen in one text which demonstrates criticism and praise (Q 57:27). The text describes Jesus's followers with two attributes: *ra'fah* and *rahmah*, which are almost synonymous. However, they are used together; *ra'fah* implies the compassion that a person feels on seeing another person in pain and distress, and *rahmah* is the feeling under which he tries to help him.³⁶⁶ The text refers to two meanings: the first, God did not enjoin monasticism upon Christianity or its followers; the second, they themselves invented it to seek God's pleasure. He only enjoined upon them seeking God's pleasure by doing good and avoiding evil. In both cases, this passage makes it clear

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990), vol. 10, p 343.

³⁶⁴ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn *Jarir*, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 14, p. 210

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibn Kathīr, Ismā'īl. *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azim*,'. (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, 1988) vol. 2., p, 349

that monasticism is not part of the faith. Similar passages can be found in the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), 'There is no monasticism in Islam.'³⁶⁷ The criticism to Christians is that they were involved in a double error: first, they imposed on themselves the restrictions which God had not imposed; second, they did not observe the restrictions that they had imposed upon themselves in the right way.

Conclusion

The Qur'anic discourse on Christians in Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis alternates between condemnation and praise. It promises those who believed in God and did good actions or supported Muslims at the era of Muhammad a goodly reward. It also condemns those who disbelieved in God, disobeyed the teachings of Jesus and the Gospel, did evil deeds, and denied Muhammad's prophecy and message. The positive discourse is always the same in dealing with the sacred symbols of Christianity, but changes when it deals with Christians themselves and their religious leaders, described with good characteristics in some passages and with bad ones in others. It can be argued that the Qur'an does not equalise between all Christians nor does it consider them all the same—except on a few numbered occasions—with reference to specific groups amongst them. In the majority of passages, it uses phrases such as '*illā qalīlan minhum*', 'except a few of them', or '*aktharuhum*', 'most of them', to confirm the variety among their religious attitude and commitment to God.

Therefore, it can be noted that the Qur'anic discourse does not dismiss Christianity in its totality nor discourage Muslims from befriending those who are compassionate and sincere among them. Rather, the Qur'anic discourse adopts balanced tone and treatment, recognising the good attributes of those who are true to God and condemning those who are not.³⁶⁸ Thus, there is no contradiction between the texts which praise the first group and the texts which criticise the second, as these passages are respectively addressing two different categories, based on their beliefs, intentions, and deeds. It is also clear that the Makkan *Sūrahs* contain more polemical passages against pagans and disbelievers than the Madinan *Sūrahs*. However, the Madinan Qur'an contains a good deal of polemical passages against Jews and Christians who

³⁶⁷ Narrated by Al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Mu'jam al-Awsat*, (Cairo: Dar al-Haramayn, 1995)

³⁶⁸ Al-Kharashi, Suleiman, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Kitāb*, (Riyadh: Dar al-Tawheed lil-nashr, no date) pp. 17-18.

are addressed in the longest *Sūrahs*, such as *Al-Baqarah*, *Āl ‘Imrān*, *Al-Nisā’*, and *Al-Mā’idah*. The implicit discourse on the Christians, which is related to their sacred symbols and key figures, appears in several places in the Qur’an, with both a positive tone toward the sacred symbols and a varying tone towards the Christians themselves and their religious leaders. The Qur’an displays a negative attitude towards some of the followers of Christianity and monks and priests, who took bribes and distorted the word of God to accumulate wealth unjustly, as well as those who followed them blindly. The focal Qur’anic discussion concerning the Christian faith is in its doctrines—it takes a polemical form on such matters and condemns the beliefs that are invented and attributed to the faith itself.

Al-Ṭabarī with his traditional methodology demonstrates the implicit discourse on Christians through the various views of other exegetes, relying on the occasions of revelation and historical context he referred to. Then, after referring to interpretations and commentaries of other exegetes, he chose his own and preferred interpretations. His commentary on the passages related to *Ahl Al-Kitāb* showed the fluctuating discourse between negative and positive and clarifies the reasons for criticism and the reason for praise. However, in his commentary on other texts related to Jews and Christians, he refers to the same occasions of revelations to different passages. This opens the door to the unreliability or inaccuracy of the occasions of revelations that he alludes to in his interpretation. There are issues with the occasions of revelation which are only available for a few groups of passages. When they are, it frequently happens that numerous contradictory occasions of revelations are narrated. In other examples, an identical narrative is cited as an occasion of revelation for different verses. But this was not a problem for premodern exegetes who went through the Qur’an, verse by verse, and gathered the relevant material connected to each verse, rarely establishing a larger context.³⁶⁹

The textual analysis of the passages about Nasara demonstrates that there are multi-layered patterns and themes that emerge from them, one of which is the proliferation of categories of the groups, indicative of the Qur’an’s ongoing classification of humankind at a religious, social, moral and dogmatic level. Formal religious

³⁶⁹ Pink, Johanna, *Muslim Qur’anic Interpretation Today, Media, Genealogies and Interpretative Community*, (UK: Equinox, 2019), p. 132

designations—Jews, Christians, Sabians, Magians—and the specification of particular sub-groups like Christian monks and priests lead to less clearly defined yet descriptive phrases like *those who followed (Jesus)*, and *idolaters*. There is also a categorisation of these people from a positive and negative moralistic perspective, pitting those who are balanced, just, submissive to God, steadfast, compassionate, merciful, testify in favour of the truth, rejectors of evil and not arrogant, against those who sin and commit evil. However, the overriding classification is the divide between those who believe and those who disbelieve.

The passages speak on occasions as the direct voice of God; at other times, they speak via the medium of Prophets, both of which deliver an energy to the narrative, which usually climaxes in the form of a divine promise. The categorisation and qualities mentioned in the texts evoke a judgment that issues in reward or punishment. One passage, structured as a series of promises to Jesus, concludes with the pledge of a divine adjudication. In another verse, those judged favourably are promised a spiritual and psychological reward. Elsewhere a twofold reward is promised for those who happen to face a difficulty in accepting the message of revelation.

The exegeses' delimitation controls the depiction of Christian identity, limiting divine approval to a small number of Christians, whereas a larger Christian community is condemned and is subjected to a range of religious accusations and denunciation. The minority group, briefly put, are those who followed the *Injil* in its uncorrupted form. The Qur'an presents this community almost as a theological concept, bearing little if not any resemblance to present or past sociological manifestations of the Christian community.

The Christians in the Qur'an are depicted as those who guarded God's revelation in its pristineness and kept themselves pure from eventual dogmatic deviations of their coreligionists. They are identified as those who were in anticipation of God's final prophet who would present fresh revelation, fulfilling that which Jesus had brought. As thus, they could not be subject to cognitive dissonance over the messages of Jesus and Muhammad, and would in fact welcome the latter's advent. As thus, they are those who either accepted the prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh), or would have done so had their circumstances permitted. The geography of these conversions is geographically confined to the Arabian-Abyssinian-Byzantium regions. The exegetes

do not deal with the status of Christians under Muslim rule, nor with the evolving nature of Christian beliefs and practices. As thus, not much has been fleshed out in terms of Christian development for the post-prophethood era. Modern commentators have attempted to fill in this vacuum, although they have failed to address these issues in systematic fashion. For the scholars of exegesis, the understanding of Christians remains a largely conceptual theological construct, largely aloof from the realities of time and place yet remaining subject to judgment on theological and moral grounds.

PART THREE

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK IN CONTEMPORARY EXEGESES

I. Introduction

The exegesis of the Qur'an nowadays is interwoven with the political framework, particularly those of Islamic countries. It is also beset by tensions: tensions between local and global forces; tensions between hierarchical and egalitarian social ideals; and tensions between the quest for new approaches and the claim for authority raised by defenders of exegetical traditions. In the Muslim world, one would find varying responses to requests for contemporary exegeses. Some would say there is no need; others would recommend some simple contemporary commentaries.³⁷⁰ There are works which aim at avoiding speculations and academic discussions, although these speculations and academic discussions take place all over the world. Such works have little mass appeal. Popular preachers also draw huge crowds, and their audiences are multiplied by appearances on television and the internet. The internet does not only provide access to Qur'an-related information and sermons, it also provides Muslims with a space to discuss questions of *Tafsīr* without the need for direct physical contact and without a necessity to reveal their identity.³⁷¹

Contemporary exegetes do not reject every single component of the classical tradition, though they do not regard it as authoritative. They vary in their usage of premodern exegesis. Modernism has also brought forth its own exegetical authorities such as Muhammad 'Abdu and others. This has the paradoxical effect that some types of modernism—those that mainly reproduce the views of earlier modernist authorities—might actually appear to be conservative in a 21st century setting. Contemporary exegetes want to find solutions to modern problems—solutions that are appropriate to their place and time. They make ample use of the pragmatic instruments provided in Islamic law like public interest (*maṣlaḥa*), overriding need (*ḍarūra*) and the assumption that God has made the religion easy. Modernists are sometimes scholars by training. In those cases, it is that sceptical attitude towards traditional Islamic learning that qualifies them as modernist. Muhammad 'Abdu, who had studied at Al-

³⁷⁰ Pink, Johanna, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today, Media, Genealogies and Interpretative Community*, (UK: Equinox, 2019), p. 5

³⁷¹ Ibid.

Azhar in Cairo, but was rather disenchanted with this situation, is a case in point. Others, especially in the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries received a hybrid education in both traditional Islamic schools and secular institutions, although the latter might still have drawn on Islam as a source of morality. A third group, especially among the more recent modernists, have received no formal religious education at all. This is closely connected to the loss of the scholars' monopoly on education and the rise of print culture.³⁷²

The extent to which scholars are operating under modernist paradigms depends on the religious and educational institutions of the country they work in. For example, modernism is very widespread in Turkey, and its proponents are more similar to the university professors from other disciplines than traditional Muslim scholars in the way they dress, speak and write. In Saudi Arabia, the opposite is the case. Iran's Shī'ī seminaries host a wide variety of scholars, some of whom clearly identify as clerics, but are staunchly modernist at the same time. There is also an activist component to modernism, with some borne out of the context of social reform or the fight against discrimination and racism. A modernist interpretation of the Qur'an in these cases can be an important instrument aimed at convincing Muslim communities that their agenda does not clash with Islam, but is instead the result of a rational reading of the Qur'an.³⁷³

This methodology of the contemporary exegetes aids in offering new reflections, interpretations, and clear explanations in their commentaries on the texts relating to the People of the Book. These explanations vary from one contemporary exegete to another. Some contemporary exegetes hold that the relationship with the People of the Book is based on respectable coexistence and harmony rather than conflict. They view that the People of the Book are petitioners of friendship and harmony, not agents of conflict.³⁷⁴ According to them, the goals of religion are confirming belief, perfecting reason and morals, cultivating and perfecting the soul, and perfecting acts that depend on welfare and benefit to perfect the body.³⁷⁵ They further elaborated the basic principles that all prophets and messengers came to convey. Moreover, they enumerated three matters: belief in God, belief in the Last Day, and doing good deeds.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 127

³⁷³ Ibid., 128

³⁷⁴ Wood, A. S. '*Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍa Modernist Defense of Islam*' (London: Oneworld, 2008) p. 78

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 86-87

These are the criteria for sincere belief in the sight of God, and they are mentioned in passages of the Qur'an (See Q 2:62, 5:69, 22:17). According to them, reward from God and eternal salvation is based on belief and good deeds, not on belief only or deeds only, and not simply affiliation to a certain religion.³⁷⁶ God will judge people on the basis of merit and piety rather than on the grounds of apparent religious affiliation.³⁷⁷

Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī have also offered contemporary interpretation and explanations of the passages related the Jews and Christians and showed a fluctuating tone in commentaries on these passages. These exegeses have been selected because they differ in approach and style, in contrast to classical exegeses. They recontextualise the passages about Jews and Christians and introduce detailed and modern interpretation, which is compatible and relevant to the current issues related to *Ahl Al-Kitāb*. They also stress the rationality of Islam, display a positive attitude towards science, and avoid Judeo-Christian sources along with superstitious practices and beliefs. Moreover, unlike classical exegeses, little emphasis is placed on the circumstances and environment of Muslims during the Prophet Muhammad's era.³⁷⁸ Contemporary exegeses presented novel approaches and contemporary methodologies by introducing a link between Islam and modernity.³⁷⁹ They view that the Qur'an was revealed to draw the minds of people to reasonable concepts about their success in this world and in the Hereafter. According to them, the Qur'an aims at guiding mankind towards this development and progress; and it is the duty of the exegete to discover the signs of God in the Qur'an. Due to this conviction, he developed distinguished viewpoints in his interpretation of the passages relating to the People of the Book in the Qur'an.

Ibn 'Āshūr introduced a modern methodology in his exegesis. It is also considered an important contemporary contribution to the Islamic scholarship of exegesis, in which he tried to enlighten the Muslim mind and construct a modern methodology and approach to the text of the Qur'an. He employed many other exegeses as references,

³⁷⁶ MS: Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990) vol.1, p. 94, and vol.1 p. 278

³⁷⁷ Ibid.,

³⁷⁸ Sirry, Mun'im, *Scriptural Polemics, The Qur'an and Other Religions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 10-15

³⁷⁹ Wood, A. S. '*Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍa Modernist Defense of Islam*' (London: Oneworld, 2008) p. 16

nevertheless, he avoided being captive to these works. For this reason, he named his exegesis: *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* (i.e. The Verification and Enlightenment). In his introduction, Ibn 'Āshūr outlined his methodology regarding exegesis. He maintains that exegesis is the science of searching for the meanings of words and what might be derived briefly or in detail from them. He discussed the issue of the linguistic link between the Qur'anic text and the reader and used independent opinion (*ra'y*) and occasions of revelation (*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*) as a tool in his exegesis.³⁸⁰

Sha'rāwī is also considered a modernist and was a specialist in Qur'anic Arabic, and he was naturally fluent in the Egyptian dialect. In his methodology, he insisted that all aspects of life, including the past, present, and future, should be understood in light of the Qur'anic message. Despite being a teacher in Saudi Arabia, his teachings do not solely reflect the *Salafī* mentality.³⁸¹ Sha'rāwī's style of speech and charismatic personality had an obvious effect on his audience.

Thus, these two exegeses represent a significant contribution to the Islamic scholarship of Qur'anic interpretation and enjoy the approval of the majority of the Muslim community in modern days. They all adopt a modern methodology in interpreting the Qur'an to reveal its compatibility with the modern age and the current issues facing Muslims. They avoided references to inauthentic traditions, narrations, or stories which have often given rise to misunderstandings in the Islamic exegetical corpus in the past. Moreover, they abandoned the narrations of Judeo-Christian sources and quotations from the previous scriptures, which were used by classical exegeses, that had led to contradictions on various issues. Naturally, they had also adopted a new approach and fresh explanation in dealing with passages pertaining to the People of the Book. A survey of studies relating to this topic in English revealed a scarcity regarding these two modern exegeses. This study aims to add to this field, as well as to the rich collection of academic research on Qur'anic exegesis, especially that pertaining to the People of the Book.

This part of the thesis will examine the People of the Book in light of contemporary exegeses: *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* by Ibn 'Āshūr (d. 1973 CE), and Sha'rāwī's *Tafsīr*

³⁸⁰ M. Nafi, Basheer, *Tahir ibn 'Āshūr: The Career And Thought Of A Contemporary Reformist Alim*, (Journal of Qur'anic Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2005), pp. 1-32, Published by: Edinburgh University Press on behalf of the Centre for Islamic Studies at SOAS.

³⁸¹ Brinton, G. Jacqueline 'Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt' (Oakland, University of California Press, 2016)

(d. 1998 CE). It seeks to find out to what extent do these two exegetes understand and contextualise the positive, negative and polemical texts related to the People of the Book. A chapter is devoted to each exegete, discussing how the People of the Book are highlighted in their exegesis and how they interpreted the Qur'anic texts relating to them. It will also examine, in a separate chapter, the polemical discourse of the Qur'an in the classical and contemporary exegeses.

II. The Emergence of Contemporary Exegesis

Exegesis is an ever-developing process. With it, the meanings of the Qur'an have been revealed as layers throughout the passage of time. Historically, Muslim scholars have excelled in science and academia. Not only in religious disciplines, but also in others, including chemistry, algebra, astronomy, physics, and medicine. Exegesis is one of those religious disciplines which has particularly received criticism as a result of modern reforms.³⁸² Due to this, the genre of Qur'anic exegesis is a subject that has undergone more development than other Islamic sciences or disciplines.³⁸³ It is an indispensable channel, responding to the internal and external needs of humanity.

The earliest noted Qur'anic exegesis is that of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It was characterised by its brevity and simplicity. It was also not written down, since the Companions were present during revelation—their methodology was one of practicality rather than theory. Ibn 'Abbās was a notable companion and key figure in Qur'anic exegesis who explained the meaning of Qur'anic passages using classical Arab poetry. This is the most sophisticated form of exegesis that existed during the period of the four caliphs.³⁸⁴ Its earliest historical recording as a science began with it being considered a branch of *ḥadīth*, consisting of Prophet Muhammad's statements regarding certain passages of the Qur'an. The practice of exegesis as a science was unknown at this point. The expansion of the Muslim empire from 40 AH onwards, along with the emergence of non-Arabic speaking Muslims and the changing social conditions of the Muslim community, brought about a sophisticated science of exegesis. The Umayyad period witnessed a group of Muslim scholars who developed Qur'anic sciences such as the *Qirā'āt* (modes of recitation), *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*

³⁸² Ayoub, Mahmoud, *Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'an and Sunnah*, (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012) p. 81

³⁸³ Zebiri, K. '*Mahmud Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) p. 128

³⁸⁴ Al-Khuli, Amin, '*Manāḥij Tajdīd fi'l Nahw wa'l Balāgha wa'l Tafsīr wa'l-Adab*', (Cairo: 1961) p. 273

(occasions of revelation), and *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* (the Abrogating and Abrogated). The Qur'an and its message became an object of study, while previously being a direct influence on the character and life of Muslims.³⁸⁵

Tafsīr has been categorised into two eras, classical and modern with mainly two trends that the exegesis generally follows: *bil-ma'thūr* and *bil-ra'y*. Exegesis *bil-ma'thūr* relies on narrations, while exegesis *bil-ra'y* relies on mainly rational principles. The science of exegesis stagnated in producing original works after Al-Rāzī's era until recent times. The exegeses written between these two periods were narrated and copied from the previous ones. After this period, modern exegetes introduced a new methodology in their interpretation to the meaning of the Qur'an in order to motivate Muslims in sermon-like fashion, and guide them to the real objectives behind the message of the Qur'an which encourages development, progress and reforms. The shift to teaching and understanding the Qur'an amongst the masses started from the 18th century with Shah Wali Allah Dihlawi in India, a reformer who attributed an important role to Qur'anic education against the backdrop of the decline of the Mughal Empire and the introduction of aberrative practices. He argued for a pedagogical reform as well as a spiritual one, with the Qur'an taking centre stage. He argued for the translation of the Qur'an into various languages for his geography; he translated it into Persian, and his son translated it into Urdu. Over a century later, two Middle Eastern exiles, al-Afghānī and 'Abdu published the journal *al-'Urwah* in Paris, which was deeply influential, introducing within it the central nature of the Qur'an to the Islamic faith. The centrality of the Qur'an is also discernable in other reformist movements, especially in the colonial era which was backed up by Christian missionaries.³⁸⁶

The approaches taken up by these reformists meant the message of the Qur'an delivered in the respective commentaries broke away from the norm of focusing solely on the literary aspects of the Qur'an. This began a discourse of polemic against all elements of Qur'anic exegesis that were seen as divisive or pointless by both modernists and scripturalists. Theological disputes gave way to Qur'anic discourses

³⁸⁵ Shihāta, Abdallah, '*Tārīkh al-Qur'an wa Al-Tafsīr*', (Cairo: Dar Gharib, 1972) p. 115, 129 and Zebiri, K. '*Mahmud Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism*' (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) pp. 128-129

³⁸⁶ Pink, Johanna, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today, Media, Genealogies and Interpretative Community*, (UK: Equinox, 2019), p. 17-18

that focused more on how practical issues were facing Muslims. Other mystical disciplines like '*Taṣawuf*' are under the spotlight for being too superstitious for the new trend. The role of the schools of fiqh came under scrutiny as well.³⁸⁷

Those scholars embody the continuation of the scholarly tradition of Tafsīr. It is entirely possible for a scholar to develop innovative ideas, but proposing these ideas in an established form and genre will enhance their chances of being recognised as an important contribution to scholarship. They propose Qur'anic interpretations that explicitly aim to make the Qur'an compatible with the conditions of modern societies, usually achieved by methods that place great emphasis on historical contextualisation and on the Qur'an's objectives.³⁸⁸

III. Features of Contemporary Exegeses

Each work of exegesis always carries its distinctive features, but are all kinds of exegesis characterised by a genealogical tradition, meaning each new work is built upon the entirety of previous works and has the benefit of hindsight? Citation was an important part of exegesis. Some adopted a more literal approach whereas others understood the Qur'an to contain more metaphors. Opinions of early scholars of Islam were considered to be highly authoritative, although they could be discarded if the exegete had a preference for another pre-existing opinion, or if the opinion he left was not authentic. Another dimension to exegesis was the creeping in of allegorical *Tafsīr*, usually of Shī'a or Sunnī-Ṣūfī origin. These were deeply mistrusted in traditional circles and never made it into the mainstream. Although these works and their opinions survive, they do not occupy a place in central exegetical thought, and are largely ignored by mainstream Qur'an commentaries.³⁸⁹

Whereas most exegeses are deeply reliant on previous works in terms of sub-genres, exegesis is a broad enough subject to accommodate new ones too. An example of this would be the 20th century Egyptian scholar, Sayyid Quṭb's '*Fī Ṣilāl al-Qur'an*', considered now to be a modern classic and is cited alongside premodern works. He

³⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 19-20

³⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 11-12

³⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 37-38

purposefully did not use the term *Tafsīr* to label his book, but his work is still considered a commentary in the Qur'anic field.³⁹⁰

To comprehend the position of contemporary exegesis scholars, the concept of 'modernism' and 'reform' must first be understood. Islamic modernism was an attempt to free Islam from the shackles of overly rigid orthodoxy and to accomplish reforms which would render it adaptable to the complex demands of modern life'.³⁹¹ According to Fazlur Rahman, the use of reason when studying the Qur'an is a fundamental feature of the modernist Muslim methodology. The works of Muhammad 'Abdu and his followers are considered modernist in the sense that they reviewed Islam's compatibility with modernity.³⁹² Although modernism is a widely accepted concept attributed to individuals such as Muhammad 'Abdu, Hishām Sharābī (d. 2005 CE) disagreed with the term 'Islamic modernism'. He regards 'Abdu's stream of intellectual thinking as identifying with Islamic reformism, not modernism.³⁹³ Because the features of Islamic reformism were to safeguard Islam by reviving the dynamic element of Islam's tradition, modernist thinking derives its central assumption not from Islamic tradition, but from Western thought. According to Sharābī, reformism was a movement initiated by younger scholars who were aware that Islam, in order to be adequately defended, required Muslims to overcome its inertia in an effort to revive it. As a consequence, 'Abdu's line of thinking as an Islamic reformist was circulated primarily by Riḍā through *Al-Manār* journal, probably the most significant reformist periodical for Muslims for over thirty-five years.³⁹⁴

The contemporary phase of exegesis is an important one. The motivation behind it was to simplify the contents of the text, making it easy for the recipient. Another was to spread the social and religious ideas and values which are associated with modern platforms of reform.³⁹⁵ Some exegeses which have been written in the 19th and 20th

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 38

³⁹¹ Rippin, Andrew, *The Qur'an, Style and Contents*, (London: Routledge, 2001)

³⁹² Wood, A. S. 'Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍa Modernist Defense of Islam' (London: Oneworld, 2008) p. 10

³⁹³ Sharābī, Hishām, *Arab Intellectual and the West: The Formative Years*, (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, 1970), p. 7

³⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 10-11

³⁹⁵ Rippin, A. 'Tafsīr' " *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2016. Brill Online, University of Exeter. 28 April 2016 <http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/Tafsīr-SIM_7294>

centuries follow the classical literary genre. However, they are distinguished with specific features and characteristics that are particular to the era's style and trend. For example, the contemporary exegetes that do not establish their own school such as Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī, have their own trends and use hypothetical opinions, in some cases, referring to the Prophet's traditions, his companions, and their successors. Most of these exegeses provide personal hypotheticals on the unclear texts of the Qur'an (*Mutashābihāt*).³⁹⁶

The other feature that is noted in contemporary exegesis is the structure of the *Sūrahs* and their division into thematic units. Additionally, the verses are thematically connected with textual allusions between consecutive *Sūrahs* and passages. In relation to this, scholars of contemporary exegesis have accounted for some passages in the Qur'an and have published their works in articles or newspapers, with the exception of a few who completed their exegeses for the whole Qur'an.³⁹⁷ Focusing on syntax in contrast to analytical grammatical discussions thus provided a syntactic explanation of each passage in the Qur'an. They shunned the exegetical details regarding the variant modes of reading and utilised new mass media, such as radio, TV, and Internet to provide modern lessons on Qur'anic exegesis.³⁹⁸ The current political, social, and cultural changes have impacted the methods and ways of contemporary exegetes. These changes led to the adoption of new ideas that aim to present the meanings and interpretations of the Qur'an as compatible with modern science and contemporary issues related to the People of the Book. These methods are based on a new understanding of the divine revelation and its mode of action.³⁹⁹

IV. Methodology of Contemporary Exegeses

The process through which the Qur'an has been interpreted has taken different forms in terms of methodology and approach. As a result, the central characteristics of contemporary exegesis and the approach Muslim scholars have taken to interpret the Qur'an have been influenced by their own social, cultural, and political contexts, which

³⁹⁶ Abdul-Raof, H. *'Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development'* (USA and Canada: Routledge 2010) p. 140

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 145-146

³⁹⁹ Wielandt, Rotraud, 'Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 28 April 2016 <http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/exegesis-of-the-quran-early-modern-and-contemporary-EQCOM_00059>

reveals an appreciation for the role the Qur'an has played in impacting the lives of Muslims.⁴⁰⁰ Wielandt (b. 1944 CE) states that, for the most part, contemporary exegetes refer excessively to classical sources, and, in doing so, have failed to contribute significant meaning to the existing one. Therefore, no disconnection appeared between the classical and contemporary stages of exegesis. However, she adds, in Arab regions, there appears to be a shift and development of approach in contemporary exegesis, especially in Egypt.⁴⁰¹

Such approaches to the Qur'an have faced obstacles from different facets of the Muslim community. Naturally, there would be much effort exerted to popularise the reinterpretation of the Qur'an considering modern exegetical standards. There remains an unchallenging loyalty to classical exegesis, especially on the part of religious elites who strongly oppose this proposal and, despite the success of contemporary methodology, remain defiantly loyal to the same classical approach. In fact, contemporary exegetes advocate that the meaning of the Qur'an should be understood in light of the Prophet Muhammad's contemporaries; thereafter, a process to 'recast into a modern intellectual outlook' is undertaken. The opposing view maintains that if the doors to interpretation are opened without standard guidelines, then there would be many interpretations and the Qur'an would no longer exist to guide people to their natural pre-ordainment—to worship the One True God. Instead, it will replace guidance for moral, social, and economic matters and render itself to an intellectual text book.⁴⁰²

However, this is not entirely founded on logic, because to consider the late nineteenth century Qur'anic exegesis as modern is to categorise it as a science of its own with its own unique features and a noticeable difference to classical exegesis. Although Muslim scholars of the late nineteenth and twentieth century have applied a diverted approach to exegesis, the traditional approach and method are very much embedded in their works. In the works of most scholars, the presence of the classical works of Al-Zamakhsharī, Al-Rāzī, Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr are apparent. As a result, the exegetical

⁴⁰⁰ Wood, A. S. '*Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs: Rashīd Riḍa Modernist Defense of Islam*' (London: Oneworld, 2008) p. 9

⁴⁰¹ Wielandt, Rotraud. '*Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary*.' Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an, Brill Online, University of Exeter, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/exegesis-of-the-qur-a-n-early-modern-and-contemporary-EQCOM_00059

⁴⁰² Ibid.

traditions demonstrate an unbroken chain of tradition that has continued to this day. To arrive at the desired understanding of the content and to select the appropriate method of interpretation are specific features of nineteenth century Qur'anic exegesis. The purpose was to revisit Qur'anic exegesis in order to provide answers to questions which arose as a result of Western civilisation impacting the political, cultural, and social changes in the Muslim world. Fundamentally, the aim was to establish Qur'anic compatibility with modern science and to find an appropriate political and social order founded upon Qur'anic principles and values.⁴⁰³

In an attempt to aid the exegete, a short treatise compiled by 'Abdu in his introduction to *Al-Fātiḥah* laid out the method and approach employed for the exegesis to follow. The treatise additionally served as a counter to the claims of the critics. The rationalist approach towards interpreting the Qur'an came as a result of witnessing the political dominance and scientific development of the West. This was initiated by 'Abdu, who desired to bring the understanding of modern civilisation to his country and the Muslim population at large. Understanding the Qur'an as the basis for all human governance, 'Abdu approached the Qur'an from a rationalistic point of view. Accordingly, he viewed Islam as being the religion of reason and progress. Therefore, it was perfectly sensible to initiate a reform to allow Muslims to grasp this ideology, and this was possible because they were capable of laying the foundations of a modern society and lead the way to it.⁴⁰⁴

Regardless of the above guidelines for contemporary exegesis, the contemporary era is a witness to Qur'anic commentators branching out in their approaches to interpreting the Qur'an, both scientifically and literarily. The scientific methodology aimed to use the Qur'an for both political and scientific development. Literary analysis, on the other hand, aims to study the Qur'an's linguistic and rhetorical style, similar to how Shakespearean works are studied. There were strong objections to these methodologies. Rashīd Riḍā in his objection put forth the argument that the Qur'an is neither a science book nor a piece of literature. Al-Azhar committee also raised strong objections like those of Riḍā's. Despite the two proposed methods extending an open

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 2

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. pp .2-5

invitation to interpret the Qur'an, the lack of support and the towering opposition meant it was left unexplored.⁴⁰⁵

An example of the scientific methodology is to be noted in the works of the Egyptian scholar Ṭanṭāwī Jawahrī, who was a prominent representative of scientific exegesis in the twentieth century, despite the criticism he received. His exegesis, named '*Al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*', is an encyclopaedic survey of modern science. Jawahrī states that these sciences are already mentioned in selected passages of the Qur'an, upon which his lengthy didactic expositions of pertinent topics are based. This is interspersed with tables, drawings, and photographs. Jawahrī was not interested in providing proof of the *I'jāz* of the Qur'an (its miraculous nature). His aim was to convince his contemporary Muslims to become concerned with sciences to do with Islamic law. Only then, he predicts, will Muslims regain and enjoy their political independence and become once again powerful.⁴⁰⁶ Other Qur'anic commentators have taken the same approach to scientific exegesis. Proving less popular now, they were mainly characterised as apologetic. An example of such work is *al-Islām wa al-Ṭibb al-Ḥadīth* (Islam and Modern Medicine) by 'Abd al-Aziz Ismail (d. 1942 CE), and 'Abdur-Razzaq Nawfal's *Al-Qur'ān wa Al-'Ilm al-Ḥadīth* (The Qur'an and Modern Science).⁴⁰⁷

Contemporary scholars of exegesis maintain that the Qur'an must be understood in light of the meaning it held for the contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). This approach will aid the Muslim community and shape their lives to the objective of the Qur'an. Exegeses were also written to serve the needs of those lacking in knowledge of Qur'anic sciences by non-Arabs, such as Abu Al-'Ala Al-Mawdūdī's work (d. 1979 CE). Some non-Muslim scholars also attempted to provide commentary on the Qur'an. These include Ian Netton's analysis of *Sūrah Al-Kahf* 18, and Antony John's analysis of the story of Job.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Wielandt, Rotraud. 'Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/exegesis-of-the-qur-a-n-early-modern-and-contemporary-EQCOM_00059

⁴⁰⁶ Ṭanṭāwī Jawahrī, *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm al-mushtamil 'alā ajā'ib badā'i' al-mukawwanāt wa-gharā'ib al-āyāt al-bāhirāt*, 26 parts, Cairo 1341/1922, 1350/1931

⁴⁰⁷ Wielandt, Rotraud. 'Exegesis of the Qur'an: Early Modern and Contemporary.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/exegesis-of-the-qur-a-n-early-modern-and-contemporary-EQCOM_00059

⁴⁰⁸ Abdul-Raof, H. '*Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*' (USA: Routledge, 2010), (pp. 145-146)

V. Exegesis in Recent Days

Considering authorship, origin, target group and style, a basic typology of contemporary Qur'anic commentaries would uncover that there are three fundamental types of exegesis: scholastic, institutional and popular. The first is the most conventional and is targeted at traditional Muslim academics, replete with references to classical exegeses. It is written usually by a single Muslim scholar. Examples would be the exegeses of M. Sayyid Ṭaṇṭawī and al-Zuḥaylī.⁴⁰⁹ Institutional exegeses have emerged because of nation states. Such Muslim states have commissioned a group of religious academics to complete a work on exegesis and passed it off as an official exegesis work, even though if it technically is not. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Religion has engaged in such a project and considers its Qur'anic commentary a national project. However, as this is potentially politically problematic for many seats of Muslim higher education, institutions like al-Azhar and the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) have been reluctant to assume full responsibility for such projects; al-Azhar delegates authorship to a body that carries the title of a committee of scholars under the supervision of the Islamic Research Academy at al-Azhar'; the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs outsources responsibility to individual authors.

Popularised commentaries started out in the 20th century. Journalistic in nature and much of the time published in mass media for broad consumption, they require a minimal amount of literacy. But the style and target groups can vary in this category. Rashīd Riḍā's exegesis, initially published in *al-Manār* magazine, is considered elitist, whereas Sha'rāwī's commentary is completely geared towards a TV audience. Evoking emotion and improvising in expression, such commentaries aim to leave a direct impression on their audiences.⁴¹⁰

Premodern exegetical literature continues to rank highly in modern discourse, and is a tool for modern exegetes to demonstrate skill and rigour to support their own narrative in their personal context, rather than as to construct a historical narrative of Qur'anic interpretation. Perception of exegesis has also shifted; what was once considered to be a literary endeavour gave way to comprehensive meanings of the

⁴⁰⁹ Pink, Johanna, and بـنـك جـوانـه. "Tradition, Authority and Innovation in Contemporary Sunnī Tafsīr: Towards a Typology of Qur'an Commentaries from the Arab World, Indonesia and Turkey / التقليد والسلطة والابتكار في التفاسير السنية المعاصرة: نحو تصنيف لتفاسير القرآن الكريم من العالم العربي واندونيسيا وتركيا" *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 12, 2010, pp. 56–82. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25831165.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

Qur'an. The exegesis of the 14th century scholar, Ibn Kathīr, a student of Ibn Taymiyyah, is sold and studied widely in the modern Muslim world. Ibn Kathir's *Tafsīr* relies on a more sunnah-based approach to explaining the Qur'an, rather than deep philosophical or literary discourse.⁴¹¹

The impact of the Qur'anic exegesis is realised when it is shared, whether orally, visually or in writing. The effect of media on the contents of the Qur'anic interpretation is hard to overestimate. Media changes also effected changes in authorship, style, substance and presentation. Perceptions of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an shifted from the literary to the scientific, numerical and historical. The demise of the manuscript culture and the rise of printed media are central in the change of how premodern exegetical traditions are now received. The print culture allowed for the global distribution of journals such as *al-'Urwa* and *al-Manār*, which were influential in disseminating exegetical thought. This new wave of globalisation bolstered ideas of Muslim unity that seemed more important than ever given the political situation of Muslims across the world.⁴¹²

In Saudi Arabia, King Fahd established the King Fahd Complex in Madinah for printing and distributing the Qur'an. Particularly, the ideas and works of Ibn Taymiyyah were distributed en masse by the state, and naturally, Ibn Kathir's works were also published, one of which is his exegesis. This demonstrates that wealth has a role to play in the spreading of works and ideas. The same was true for Indian scholar Siddiq Hasan Khan, who managed to publish his works widely because he married into a wealthy family.⁴¹³ One of the negative side-affects of all this was the use of libraries to locate dwindled manuscripts, and became the domain of ultra-specialists. These media changes were thresholds in the transmission of earlier material, some Qur'anic exegetical works made it across the threshold, whereas others did not. At the turn of 21st century, a wave of editions broadened access to premodern works in print, but this coincided with the rise of online in the form of electronic libraries and PDF scans of works.

⁴¹¹ Pink, Johanna, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today, Media, Genealogies and Interpretative Community*, (UK: Equinox, 2019), p. 35

⁴¹² Ibid., p. 82

⁴¹³ Ibid., p. 82

Although labour intensive, this digitisation process provided an even wider platform for people to access premodern and modern works. Platforms like Altafsir.com, operated from Jordan, have a marked influence on the way in which users make use of the exegetical tradition. This has given rise to an educated class of Muslims that have not undertaken any formal studies at a higher seating of Islamic learning, which usually combines Islamic studies at a mutlidisciplinary level. Crossing over into the 21st century, *Tasfīr* not only became a means to educate, but also a means to entertain.⁴¹⁴

In the online world, blogs and YouTube channels exhibit the latest trends on the publishing of exegetical material. Some do little more than present the contents of a book in a more structured manner; others emphasise the devotional aspects that Qur'anic exegesis may take. User-generated content can wildly differ in quality. People can produce low-quality videos from the comfort of their own homes, whereas high-quality production like that of Nouman 'Ali Khan's *Bayyinah*.tv provides a large amount of audiovisual exegesis material for a subscription. This rise of online, and media in general, has the potential to popularise Qur'anic interpretations, or some of them. However, media availability alone does not translate into popularity and how well exegetical positions are received. Some might prove to be more popular than others. The decision to choose one over the other is linked to authority that audiences accord both the commentator and his interpretation. This has incentivised commentators to 'name-drop' authorities in their exegesis.⁴¹⁵

The following three chapters will introduce more details on the Qur'anic discourse about the treatment of the People of the Book in the two contemporary exegeses: *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* by Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī's *Khawāṭir*. They will elaborate on the passages which contain one of the three types of discourses: negative, positive, and polemical. The last chapter, which is the third type of Qur'anic discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, will discuss the polemical discourse of the Qur'an with the *Ahl Al-Kitāb* and present examples of polemical passages in the classical and contemporary exegeses, as well as how they were understood.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 83

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p. 84

5. CHAPTER FIVE

People of the Book in the Exegesis of Ibn 'Āshūr

Introduction

The author of *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, Muhammad Al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr, is the most renowned Imam of Al-Zaytūnah University and one of the great Islamic scholars of the 20th century. His exegesis *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* is considered amongst the most popular exegeses and enjoys high reputation among Muslim scholars in the modern era. His exegesis strikes a balance between traditions and modernity, with a primary aim of renewal and reform of Muslims through Islamic teachings and education.⁴¹⁶ Given his enthusiasm and expertise, he was appointed to supervise Al-Zaytūnah and education in Tunisia in general. In promoting educational reform, Ibn 'Āshūr takes a centrist stance between two contemporary groups, namely, 'neo-literalism' and 'neo-rationalism'. The former ignores rationales, modernity, and valid reinterpretations of the Islamic rulings for the sake of literal traditional views. The latter, on the other side of the spectrum, ignores the religious and cultural identity of Muslims in its quest for 'modernisation' and 'rationality'. Therefore, in his own work, it is evident that he valued the contribution of the traditional works, but did not consider them absolute. He quoted from and referred to the previous exegeses when it was required and beneficial, and avoided putting forth his own opinion in the absence of the views of renowned scholars from the past.⁴¹⁷

It appears that he was exposed to the discourses of Western ideas and the local Islamic reforms that were rising within scholarly circles during the French occupation. This influence impacted his philosophy relatively early in his academic years in Al-Zaytūnah. Consequently, he chose to side with the reformist movement. In doing so, Ibn 'Āshūr chose a mostly non-confrontational political course throughout his career.⁴¹⁸ Furthermore, the impact of his environment is evident in his exegesis, which contains

⁴¹⁶ Al-Hamad, Muhammad Ibrahim, *Al-Taqrīb li Tafsīr Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Riyadh: Dar Ibn Khuzayma, 2008), vol.1 p. 11.

⁴¹⁷ Al-Atiq, Jabir Abdir Rahman, *Juhūd al-'Allamah Ibn 'Āshūr fī ar-Radd 'Ala Shubuhāt an-Naṣāra min khilāl tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 2011, p. 14

⁴¹⁸ Klausning, K. 'Two Twentieth Century Exegetes between Traditional Scholarship and Modern Thought: Gender concepts in Tafsīr of Muhammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr' In Gorke, A and Pink J (eds) *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History; Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre* (Oxford University Press, London, 2014), pp. 424-425

quotations from numerous sciences, both modern and religious. Readers of Ibn ‘Āshūr’s exegesis will notice his referencing to numerous fields of study, as well as his highlighting the various aspects of the inimitability of the Qur’an. According to many religious thinkers, especially within classical scholarly circles, these inclusions are irrelevant in a work of exegesis.⁴¹⁹ Ibn ‘Āshūr presented his methodology as a detailed introduction to his exegesis. He completed it as a 30-volume piece that took approximately 40 years of writing.

It can be clearly seen, therefore, that his exegesis represents a significant contribution to the Islamic scholarship of exegesis. It adopts a modern methodology to interpret the Qur’an to bridge the gap between modern life and Muslim needs. Ibn ‘Āshūr was known for his in-depth knowledge of the People of the Book in the Islamic traditions. This is particularly apparent when one reads his exegesis, where his responses to their claims are outlined. The exegesis also adopts a contemporary attitude in interpreting the passages pertaining to the People of the Book; and it avoids citing or referring to unauthentic traditions, narrations, or stories. However, Ibn ‘Āshūr’s methodology of *Tafsīr* has been criticised by contemporary traditionalists for his excessive use of Arabic rules of grammar and rhetoric and issues related to Islamic creed. Moreover, his interpretation to some issues in the passages on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* was not detailed and percise such as the issue of salvation and destiney to the Jews and Christians.

In his commentary, Ibn ‘Āshūr refers to the modern history of Chrisitany; their divisions into various sects; their conferences and assemblies to discuss major issues in Christianity, crucifixion, and the divinity of Jesus and trinity. He also employed a lot of texts from the Old Testament and New Testament in order to refute the claims of Jews and Christians; and support his argument in his interpretation.

5.1. The Life of Ibn ‘Āshūr and His Contribution

Ibn ‘Āshūr was born in Tunisia in 1879 CE and died in 1972 CE. His family were wealthy descendants of Muslims who fled from the Iberian Peninsula to North Africa after the end of Islamic rule in Al-Andalus, and settled in what is known as modern-day Tunisia in the seventeenth century. Ibn ‘Āshūr had a heritage of aristocracy and

⁴¹⁹ Al- Atiq, Jabir Abdir Rahman, *Juhūd al-‘Allamah Ibn ‘Āshūr fī ar-Radd ‘Ala Shubuhāt an-Naṣāra min khilāl tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, 2011, p. 14

scholarship. As a young man, he showed keenness in pursuing further and higher studies in contrast to his contemporaries. This enthusiasm enabled him to develop the scope of his knowledge in a more specialised manner.⁴²⁰ Seeking knowledge was a long-standing tradition in his family, passed down from generation to generation.

In 1892, Ibn 'Āshūr enrolled in Al-Zaytūnah; his teachers were carefully selected – all of them shared common reform-based ideologies during the 1860s–70s. Under the guidance of his esteemed teachers, Ibn 'Āshūr became a professor at Al-Zaytūnah University when he was 24. He rose quickly in the scholarly ranks, holding the position of Shaykh of Al-Zaytūnah Mosque and, thereafter, Mālikī grand Muftī.⁴²¹ Ibn 'Āshūr was expected to be involved in the social debates of Tunisia during his post as Mufti, however, he was rather adamant to maintain a balanced and neutral stance. His time in office as grand Mufti introduced reform in personal law and the educational system. In 1961, Ibn 'Āshūr publicly disagreed with the political head of state, Bourguiba, on his request for Tunisians to avoid fasting during the month of Ramadan (the head of state felt that it decreases productivity).⁴²² Since this occasion, Ibn 'Āshūr withdrew himself from social debates and turned his focus towards intellectual activities. He was concerned about rules in Tunisia prohibiting polygyny. In his book, '*Uṣūl al-Niẓām al-Ijtimā'ī fī al-Islām* (Principles of the Social System in Islam), Ibn 'Āshūr took a stand for the right of a Muslim man to marry up to four wives. To support his stand, he cited his theory of the natural division of labour that occurs between the genders based on their biological differences. According to him, women are naturally and primarily entrusted with the care and education of children and are prohibited to participate in armed conflict, unlike men.⁴²³

Ibn 'Āshūr wrote and published books, essays, journals, and articles, most of which are concerned with these issues. He also issued a countless number of fatwas on different religious matters. The areas that he dealt with mainly were jurisprudence, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, exegesis, Arabic language, literature, and poetry. For instance, *Al-Taḥrīr*

⁴²⁰ El Meswi, M, E, T. Ibn 'Āshūr: '*Treatise on Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah*' (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006).

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Klausing, K. 'Two Twentieth Century Exegetes between Traditional Scholarship and Modern Thought: Gender concepts in Tafsīr of Muhammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr' In Gorke, A and Pink J (eds) 'Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History; Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre' (Oxford University Press, London, 2014), (p. 424-- 425)

⁴²³ Ibid, p. 425

wa Al-Tanwīr (The Verification and Enlightenment), *Kashf al-Mughattā* (Discovering the Hidden), *Al-Nazar al-Fasiḥ* (The Wide Vision), *Alaysa al-Ṣubḥ bi-Qarīb* (Is the Morning not Near?), *Uṣūl al-Nizām al-Ijtīmāʾī fī al-Islam* (Principles of the Social System in Islam), and *Maqāṣid Al-Sharīʿah Al-Islāmiyyah* (Objectives of the Islamic Sharīʿah Law). One of the works he is most famously known for is '*Maqāṣid Al-Sharīʿah Al-Islāmiyyah* (Objectives of the Islamic Sharīʿah Law), in which he wrote a detailed treatise, a proposal submitted to initiate reforms in Islamic law. However, the exegesis of *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* is perhaps his great accomplishment and scholarly contribution. Ibn 'Āshūr also met Muhammad 'Abdu during his visit to Tunisia in 1903. This meeting had sealed Ibn 'Āshūr's alignment with the spirit of the Islamic reform movement, and shortly thereafter, he began to publish articles on the need for reforming Islamic education.⁴²⁴ He was also inspired by 'Abdu's call to construct an Islamic modernity that could compete with the West's. It is no surprise that Ibn 'Āshūr followed his fellow clerics in Istanbul, Cairo, and Damascus in supporting the new ideas and reforms.

They culminated in 1957 when Tunisia's Sharīʿah courts were eliminated, ironically, not by French colonial rule, but by the newly-independent country's first president, the militant secularist Habib Bourguiba. Though he bore this assault on the Sharīʿah patiently, like Ṭanṭāwī and other established scholars, Ibn 'Āshūr had his limits.⁴²⁵ Ibn 'Āshūr worked hard, never laying down his pen nor losing the great pleasure that reading and research afforded him, until he died in 1393 AH/1973 CE at the age of ninety-four. His passing marked the disappearance of a wealth of experience in public and administrative life, and he left behind him a rich legacy of diverse and scholarly publications and articles unmatched in nineteenth and twentieth century Tunisia, many of which still await critical study and publication.⁴²⁶

5.2. The Exegesis of *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*

Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr is considered an important contemporary contribution to Islamic scholarship as it endeavours to enlighten the Muslim mind and construct a modern

⁴²⁴ Ibid

⁴²⁵ Johnathan A.C Brown '*Misquoting Muhammad; The Challenge and Choice of Misinterpreting the Prophet's Legacy*' (London: One World, 2014) p. 279

⁴²⁶ Ibn 'Āshūr, M., *Ibn 'Āshūr Treatise's Maqāṣid Al-Sharīʿah*, (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), vx

methodology through the text of the Qur'an. Although it consults and cites many exegeses as references, it maintains its independence, proving to be a unique contribution, rather than an identical repetition of past contributions.

Ibn 'Āshūr outlined his methodology in an introduction of ten guidelines included in the beginning of his exegesis to aid the reader in comprehending his work. The introduction refers to the unique use of the Arabic language and rhetoric that explains the connection between the passages and chapters, and clarifies the purposes and content of each *Sūrah*, making it accessible to the average reader. He also analyses terms and unclear words in the passages, while linking the purposes and lessons of each with Muslim life. He draws inspiration from the lessons of the Qur'an to trigger the advancement of the Muslim community.⁴²⁷ He also refers to the introductions that other exegetes wrote in their exegeses, mentioning that he was interested in showing the connection that links the passages to each other. This was an important concept discussed by Al-Rāzī, as well as Burhan al-Din Al-Baqqah, in a book titled *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āy wa al-Suwar*. However, he criticised them both because, in his view, the connection between the passages they thought of was unconvincing and failed to encompass the whole Qur'an.⁴²⁸

Ibn 'Āshūr's exegesis cannot be considered a compendium of *Fiqh*, theology, or creed; rather it is true to its title: a work of exegesis which reflects a profound understanding of the Qur'an as the main text of all Islamic sciences and knowledge. Despite not making the exegesis revolve around any said science, it still discusses issues related to creed, *Fiqh*, theology and other Islamic sciences, but with brevity and simplicity. However, some contemporary scholars criticised his way of *Tafsīr* and the inclusion of various Islamic sciences such as *Fiqh*, Arabic grammar and rhetoric, creed and others. Ibn 'Āshūr was distinguished with his own method of exegesis, which focuses on explaining the Qur'anic text (*Naṣṣ*), not adopting the methodology of specific schools of exegeses.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁷ Al-Hamad, Muhammad Ibrahim, *Al-Taqrīb li Tafsīr Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, (Riyadh: Dar Ibn Khuzayma, 2008) vol. p. 28-41.

⁴²⁸ Ibid, vol. p. 28-41.

⁴²⁹ M. Nafi, Basheer, *Tahir ibn 'Āshūr: The Career And Thought Of A Contemporary Reformist Alim*, (Journal of Qur'anic Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2005), pp. 1-32 Published by: Edinburgh University Press.

5.3. Methodology of *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*

Ibn ‘Āshūr employs a different methodology to that of former exegetes, because he was careful not to regurgitate previous approaches. His criticism of former Qur’anic exegetes showed that he held them to be merely collectors and compilers of previous Qur’anic exegeses, as they relied heavily on the works of their predecessors. The exegesis uses a passage-by-passage explanation and then sums up the passages in small sections.⁴³⁰

Ibn ‘Āshūr wanted to liberate the Qur’anic text from the traditions and methods repeated in the classical exegeses. He laid out his own way and vision of the exegesis and made a linguistic link between the Qur’anic text (*Naṣṣ*) and the reader. He used independent opinion (*ra’y*) and occasions of revelation as instruments in his exegesis. Therefore, his exegesis contains sciences related to creed, jurisprudence, previous exegetes and exegeses, Arabic language and rhetoric, history, geography, principles of education and reform, medicine, psychology, astronomy, and biology. It is also distinguished with plenty of discussions of the views of the previous exegeses and Ibn ‘Āshūr’s preferences of the views, as well as his own opinion.⁴³¹

Ibn ‘Āshūr outlined his methodology in an introduction consisting of ten guidelines, which is included in the beginning of his exegesis to aid the reader in comprehending his work. The introduction refers to the unique use of the Arabic language and rhetoric that explains the connections between the passages and chapters and clarifies the purposes and content of each *Sūrah*, making it accessible and easy to the average reader. He also analyses terms and unclear words in the passages, while linking the purposes and lessons of each with Muslim life. He draws inspiration from the lessons of the Qur’an to trigger the advancement of the Muslim community.⁴³²

From his writing, one can see Ibn ‘Āshūr had pre-planned a methodical way for his exegesis that had clarity and was well organised. He begins each *Sūrah* with a brief introduction. He speaks about the title, the reason for selection, the chronological order, the occasions of revelation of the *Sūrah* or the *Āyāt* (if known), the number of *Āyāt*, whether the *Sūrah* is Makkah or Madinan, and, finally, the main theme and aim

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ MS: Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol.1. p.8

⁴³² Al-Hamad, Muhammad Ibrahim, *Al-Taqrīb li Tafsīr Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, (Riyadh: Dar Ibn Khuzayma, 2008) vol. p. 28-41.

of the *Sūrah*.⁴³³ He states the name of the *Sūrah* in the *Muṣḥaf* (e.g. *al-Naba'*), as well as other names for the same *Sūrah* that were mentioned in other exegeses. For example, with regards to *Sūrah al-Naba'*, Ibn 'Aṭiyyah and Al-Zamakhsharī in his *al-Kashshāf* named the *Sūrah* '*Amma yatasā'alūn*', and al-Qurṭubī named it '*Amma*'; he also mentions other names for the *Sūrah*, such as *Al-Tasā'ul* and *Al-Mu'ṣirāt*.⁴³⁴

Regarding the People of the Book, Ibn 'Āshūr returns to the Gospel and the Torah to understand and determine what is mentioned in their scriptures concerning the stories of the Prophets, especially the Israelite Prophets. Unlike most of the classical exegetes, he avoided using Israelite reports and quotations from the previous scriptures to support his view. In contrast, he supports his interpretation by relying on other Qur'anic passages and authentic traditions of the Prophet Muhammad or his companions and their followers. He usually states the reason why he agrees or disagrees with other narrations or understandings.⁴³⁵ Despite the criticism of his methodology, his exegesis is regarded as one of the most popular contemporary exegeses, because it is comprehensive, consolidating between modernity and tradition, and it relies on authentic passages. He mentioned in his introduction that his exegesis contains the best of all that is mentioned in other exegeses, which probably means that he quoted from other exegeses his favoured views and interpretation, or that he thought the selection in his exegesis was the best. It seems that he is self-assured and very proud of his exegesis, but he qualified his statement when he mentioned that he has referred to issues and matters in his exegesis that no previous exegetes had done. His position as Mufti seems to have influenced his approach to his work; he had the characteristics of a judge who compares between all exegeses and makes selections based on accuracy.⁴³⁶

Ibn 'Āshūr maintains that imitating the previous exegetes and their methodology or copying from them is a sort of academic stagnation, as if to say that the miracles and treasures of the Qur'an have ceased –or that the doors of exegetical *Ijtihād* and renewal are closed. He criticised those who support the previous schools of exegesis

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 30, p. 5

⁴³⁵ Saqr, Nabil Ahmad, *Manhaj al-Imām Al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr fī Al-Tafsīr*, (Cairo: Al-Dar Al-Masriyyah, 2001), p. 38

⁴³⁶ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 1, p. 7-8

without considering modernity, and those who try to ignore it and call for the complete shunning of all previous classical exegeses.⁴³⁷

Ibn 'Āshūr refers to various exegetes and intellectuals of different orientations. In the area of exegesis, he refers mostly to Al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn 'Aṭīyyah, Al-Rāzī, Al-Bayḍāwī, al-Alūsī, Abu Al-Su'ūd, al-Qurṭubī, and Al-Ṭabarī. His methodology of referring to these passages is by referring to the name of the book or its author, or by simply quoting without referencing.⁴³⁸ Thus, Ibn 'Āshūr used three methods when quoting from other references. Either he referred to the author's views with support and agreement, or he referred to it but refuted and rejected it, or he referred to the source without comment.⁴³⁹ Although Ibn 'Āshūr was Ash'arī, his position was to avoid adherence to any specific school of thought in his exegesis, and he referred to various schools, such as the Salafīs, Ash'arīs, and Mu'tazilīs.⁴⁴⁰

5.4. Criticism of *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*

Ibn 'Āshūr's exegesis was subject to criticism on many fronts – different critics who had adopted different schools of thought. Contemporary traditionalists criticised Ibn 'Āshūr for the excessive use of Arabic rhetoric and analytical *Ta'wīl* in issues related to creed,⁴⁴¹ and for preferring rational interpretation over the traditional method. Criticism of Ibn 'Āshūr came as a result of his views concerning Islamic creed and his reliance on *Ta'wīl*. For example, Muhammad Ibn Mansur al-Fayez⁴⁴² views that Ibn 'Āshūr employed *Majāz* (metaphor) excessively to interpret the *Āyāt* (passages) related to the attributes of God, and he used his commentary on *Sūrah Al-Fātiḥa* as an example for this claim.⁴⁴³ He used *Ta'wīl* and metaphors to interpret the meaning of *Ghaḍab* (anger), *Raḥmah* (the Merciful), *Al-Raḥmān* (Lord of mercy), and *Al-Raḥīm* (Giver of mercy) in the *Sūrah*.⁴⁴⁴ He also gave other examples from *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, *Āl 'Imrān*, *Al-A'rāf*, *Hūd*, and *Ṭā-Hā*. Ibn 'Āshūr also used metaphors to interpret terms

⁴³⁷ Ibid, vol. 1, p. 7-8

⁴³⁸ Abu Hassan, Jamal, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr, Dirāsa Manhajiyah Naqdiyyah*, (Jordan: University of Jordan, 1991) p. 38, 39

⁴³⁹ Ibid, p. 40

⁴⁴⁰ M. Nafī, Basheer, *Tahir ibn 'Āshūr: The Career And Thought Of A Contemporary Reformist Alim*, (Journal of Qur'anic Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2005), pp. 1-32 Published by: Edinburgh University Press.

⁴⁴¹ Al-Maghrawi, Muhammad, *Al-Mufasssīrūn Baina Al-Ta'wīl wa al-Ithbāt*, (Beirut: Mussast ar-Risalah: 2000) vol. 3, p. 1403

⁴⁴² Professor of *Tafsīr* at Al-Qasim University, Saudi Arabia

⁴⁴³ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 1, p. 169.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

such as *Kursī* (Throne, (Q 2: 255),⁴⁴⁵ '*Istawā 'alā al-'Arsh*' (establish Himself over the Throne),⁴⁴⁶ (Q 7: 54),⁴⁴⁷ *Yad* (hand) in *Sūrah Al-Mā'idah* (Q 5:64),⁴⁴⁸ and *Wajh* (face) in *Sūrah Al-An'ām* (Q 6:52).⁴⁴⁹ Ibn 'Āshūr employed *Ta'wīl* in his interpretation of these passages, claiming that these terms were not referring to the original meanings of the words, but that they were metaphors referring to other meanings. For example, he held that hand (*yad*) meant power and authority. He also held that *Kursī* and '*Arsh*' are not to be taken literally. This criticism from the traditional school of thought is expected because the orientation of Ibn 'Āshūr which incline toward *Ta'wīl* and rational thought differs from the traditionalists orientation who reject this sort of thought.

Ibn 'Āshūr was also criticised for his interpretation of passage (Q 2: 8); he disagreed with the belief that faith (*īmān*) increases or decreases.⁴⁵⁰ Similarly, he was also criticised by 'Abdullah al-Juday' (b. 1959 CE), who viewed that Ibn 'Āshūr mentioned issues related to the attributes of God that have no basis or evidence in the *Ḥadīth*.⁴⁵¹ Similarly, Dr Tahir Ya'qūb⁴⁵² viewed Ibn 'Āshūr's methodologies as relying too heavily on *Ta'wīl* when interpreting the attributes of God, which is the Ash'arite methodology. In his book titled *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Dr M. al-Tarhūnī maintains that Ibn 'Āshūr was influenced by Mu'tazilīs and is a follower of the Ash'arī methodology.⁴⁵³

In his interpretation of many passages of the Qur'an, Ibn 'Āshūr employed scientific theories to interpret them. This is seen in his interpretation of passage (Q 2: 29).⁴⁵⁴ He was also excessive in using rules of Arabic rhetoric (grammar, syntax, and morphology).⁴⁵⁵ Some scholars claim that there is a linguistic mistake in the rules of rhetoric that he employed often in his exegesis. In his book titled, '*Al-Tafsīr Al-Balāghī lil-Istifhām*', Dr 'Abdil-'Azīm Al-Miṭ'anī (d. 2008 CE) holds that Ibn 'Āshūr broke fundamental rules of Arabic rhetoric, especially rules related to questions (i.e.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 23

⁴⁴⁶ '*Arsh* and *Kursī* are translated as the Throne in the morality of Qur'an translation

⁴⁴⁷ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 9, p. 163

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 250

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., vol. 7, p. 247

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., vol. 29, p. 353

⁴⁵¹ Al-Judai', Abdullah, *Al-Muqadimat al-Asāsīyah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an*, (Leeds: Islamic Research Centre, 2001), p. 388

⁴⁵² Ya'qūb Tahir, *Asbāb al-Khata' fī al-Tafsīr*, (Saudi Arabi, Dar Ibn Al-Jawzī, 2005) p. 103

⁴⁵³ Tarhūnī, Muhammad, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn fī Gharb Afriqiya*, (Dammam: Dar In Al-Jawzī, 2005)

⁴⁵⁴ Ṣāliḥ, Abdil-Qadir, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, (Beirut: Dar al-Marifah, 2003) p. 146)

⁴⁵⁵ Abu Hassan, Jamal, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr, Dirāsa Manhajīyah Naqdiyyah*, (Jordan: University of Jordan, 1991) p. 253-4

Istifhām).⁴⁵⁶ Other criticism was related to the excessive use of quotations and passages from other sources, which is exhaustive for the reader. He referred much to passages pertaining to the People of the Book, giving detailed explanations about the positive and negative discourse and the occasions of revelation. The critics also view the excessive use of quotations, passages of different sciences, and the rhetorical errors, as indication of a lack of original contribution to the field of exegesis. Instead, they believe it is repetition of what other exegetes have already mentioned in their works.⁴⁵⁷

Although Ibn ‘Āshūr was staunch in his objection to French colonialism and the Tunisian regime, critics still maintain that this situation had no influence on his exegesis. In other words, his exegesis is independent from issues related to the general conditions of the Muslims of his era and it does not address their strife. His work, therefore, lacks in comparison to others, such as Sayyid Quṭb’s work, whose exegesis ‘In the Shade of the Qur’an’ mentioned the degraded condition of the Muslim nation and presented solutions for contemporary issues.

Despite the criticism, Ibn ‘Āshūr has played a vital role in facing the challenges of modernity and its relationship with Islam. Not only through his exegesis, but also through his *Fatāwā* (religious verdicts), articles, and books in which he calls for change and renewal, especially after his encounter with Muhammad ‘Abdu. Ibn ‘Āshūr discusses the issue of exegesis based on reasoning and rational opinion (*Ra’y*), and accepts that interpretation based on reason is employed as a tool for the exegesis of the Qur’an. However, he stressed that it should not depend on mere conjuncture without a sound comprehension of Qur’anic Arabic, Sharī’ah rules, and consideration of the historical context. He also felt that it should not be employed as a tool to support personal dispositions or ideological doctrine.⁴⁵⁸

5.5. The Influence of ‘Abdu and Riḍā on Ibn ‘Āshūr’s Thought

The propagators of Islamic reform from Tunisia and outside of it had a great impact on Ibn ‘Āshūr’s thought and exegesis. It encouraged him to incline strongly towards

⁴⁵⁶ Al-Miṭ’anī, Abdil-Azīm, *‘Al-Tafsīr al-Balāghī lil-Istifhām*, (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 2011), vol. 3, p. 324 and vol. 4, p. 236

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 253-54

⁴⁵⁸ M. Nafi, Basheer, *Tahir ibn ‘Āshūr: The Career and Thought Of A Contemporary Reformist Alim*, (Journal of Qur’anic Studies, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2005), pp. 1-32 Published by: Edinburgh University Press.

reform and modernisation. These teachers, such as Ibrahim Al-Riyāhī, Ismā'īl al-Tamīmī, Al-Wazīr Khayr Al-Dīn Basha, Sheikh Mahmūd Qabadu, and Sheikh Salim Bouhajib, contributed much to educational reform in Tunisia. The idea of reform appears to be more prevalent and frequent in Ibn 'Āshūr's thought, especially after 'Abdu's visit to Tunisia in 1903. 'Abdu first visited Tunisia in 1884 after he returned to Paris to collect funds for his Journal *Al-'Urwat al-Wuthqā*, which he founded with his teacher Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī. It was natural that 'Abdu would visit Tunisia twice as he found it to be one of the first Muslim countries to accept his movement of reform, as well as other movements of reform, such as Muhammad Ibn 'Abdil-Wahhāb's movement in Arabia, the Dahlawī movement by Shah Waliullah, and Afghānī's movement. Supporters of reform in Tunisia, as well as Ibn 'Āshūr, were amongst those who accepted these movements of reform as they were aimed at reviving the religion and tackling the backwardness and stagnation found in parts of the Muslim nation.⁴⁵⁹

The influence of 'Abdu's visit on Tunisian scholars was very clear and it left a deep impact on them. Resulting communication and an established relationship between the intellectuals in the *Al-'Urwat al-Wuthqā* society led to warmly second visit.⁴⁶⁰ Ibn 'Āshūr, who was 23 at the time, attended 'Abdu's meetings with the Tunisian intellectuals and reformers, and he recorded his views and comments on reform and modernity. In his meeting with the intellectuals and reformers, 'Abdu advocated educational reforms and criticised the old ways and traditional methods of teaching.⁴⁶¹ He also advocated Ibn Taymiyyah's (d. 728 AH /1328 CE) works and views that focused on the important role of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and *Ijtihād* in the reconstruction of Islamic thought. This defence resulted in him accusing 'Abdu of Salafism, but Ibn 'Āshūr defended 'Abdu's views in an article published in *Al-Manār* (by Rashīd Riḍā).⁴⁶² 'Abdu meetings in Tunisia were also attended by those who opposed his ideas.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁹ Al-Ghālī, Bilqasim, *Al-Imām Muhammad Al-Tāhir Ibn 'Āshūr, Hayātu wa Athāruh*, (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2015), p.52-53

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., p.54

⁴⁶¹ Riḍā, Muhammad Rashīd, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Manār, 1931), vol. 1, pp. 380-1.

⁴⁶² Abu Zahra, Muhammad, Ibn Taymiyya, *Hayātuha wa 'Aṣruha wa Fiqhuhu*, (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1991). See MS: Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990) vol. 6: p. 927-38; and *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām*, vol. 1, p. 717, by Riḍā.

⁴⁶³ Al-Ghālī, Bilqasim, *Al-Imām Muhammad Al-Tāhir Ibn 'Āshūr, Hayātu wa Athāruh*, (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2015), p. 55

The friendship between ‘Abdu and Ibn ‘Āshūr grew stronger, especially when the former was relentlessly criticised by his opponents regarding his fatwa about Transvaal in South Africa, where Muslims had lived with Christians.⁴⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Āshūr strongly supported ‘Abdu’s fatwa against his political opponents who defamed him to the Egyptian government and accused him of using religion for personal gain. Ibn ‘Āshūr himself was on the hot seat, as he too was subjected to severe criticism on many occasions from his opponents over his *Fatāwā*. However, his impact proved more fruitful because of the manner in which he responded to these situations with patience and strength.⁴⁶⁵

‘Abdu referred to Ibn ‘Āshūr as the ambassador of the reform movement in Al-Zaytūnah University, as he considered him to be the most qualified to represent his movement. Although ‘Abdu and Ibn ‘Āshūr have similar aims and motivations for reform, each one chose different areas to focus on. ‘Abdu’s focus was on political reform, while Ibn ‘Āshūr’s inclination was towards social and educational reform. Ibn ‘Āshūr’s impact on education was apparent in Al-Zaytūnah; his ambition was to raise its status and popularity like Al-Azhar in Egypt. His impact in social reform can be noted in his book, *‘Uṣūl Al-Niẓām al-Ijtimā’ī fī al-Islām* (Principles of Social System in Islam).⁴⁶⁶

‘Abdu’s influence on Ibn ‘Āshūr’s thought process is clearly apparent in his *Fatāwā*. He viewed religion as one of the necessities for this life, and he held that Islam is a truth that complies with the human nature, not a myth. He held that it came to honour women; he felt that the ruler was allowed to disallow polygyny out of his discretion.

Despite the influence of ‘Abdu and Riḍā on Ibn ‘Āshūr’s thought, his interpretation of the passages related to the People of the Book is not as detailed and clear as those of ‘Abdu and Riḍā. They both agree in their interpretation of passages related to some polemical issues with the Jews and Christians, such as the issue of the divinity of Jesus and the changes in the meanings of sacred texts. In other issues, one of the two would give more details and explanations than the other. ‘Abdu and Riḍā were more open and relied on reason, while Ibn ‘Āshūr was more traditional. Such

⁴⁶⁴ Transvaal was a province of South Africa from 1910 until the end of apartheid in 1994.

⁴⁶⁵ Al-Ghālī, Bilqasim, *Al-Imām Muhammad Al-Tāhir Ibn ‘Āshūr, Hayātu wa Athāruh*, (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 2015), p.56

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

differences in interpretation could be the result of the slight variations in the methodologies adopted by them.

5.6. People of the Book in Ibn 'Āshūr's Exegesis

Ibn 'Āshūr maintains that the Qur'an addresses the People of the Book in various ways. He holds that direct addresses, such as 'O Children of Israel' (*Yā banī Isrā'īl*) and 'O People of the Book' (*Yā Ahl Al-Kitāb*), includes their leaders, scholars, and religious community. On other occasions, indirect referrals are employed. He holds that phrases such as 'Those who were given the Book' (*alladhīna ūtū al-Kitāb*) (Q 4: 47) and 'Those to whom We have given the Book' (*alladhīna ātaynāhum al-Kitāb*) (Q 6: 20) address the religious leaders of the Jews and Christians. In other places, the Qur'an employs phrases such as 'a group of them' (*farīqun minhum*) when addressing their scholars (Q 2: 75).⁴⁶⁷ Ibn 'Āshūr mentions that the term *Ahl Al-Kitāb* sometimes refers to Jews (Q 4: 153),⁴⁶⁸ to Christians (Q 4: 171),⁴⁶⁹ and at other times, to both (Q 4: 159).⁴⁷⁰ Ibn 'Āshūr alludes that *Ahl Al-Kitāb* mentioned in the Qur'an are those who follow a divine Book whether before Muhammad's era or at his time or after him. They are not only those who were at Muhammad's time. He distinguished between *Ahl Al-Kitāb* and other terms such as *Mushrikīn* (pagans or polytheists), *Kāfirūn* (disbelievers or rejecters), *Mu'minūn* (believers), and *Muttaqīn* (pious).⁴⁷¹ He stated three ways to define the meaning and the interpretation of the text: first, explicit wording and literal words which refers to the original meaning; the second; looking into the deep meaning and the hidden objective behind the text; the third is to bring scientific issues and link it to the deep meaning and the objective of the text. He also emphasised that definition from the meaning requires full knowledge of Arabic language, grammar, rhetoric, occasions of revelation, and the textual context.⁴⁷² These things assist in

⁴⁶⁷ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol.1 , p. 449

⁴⁶⁸ 'The People of the Book demand that you (Prophet) make a book physically come down to them from heaven, but they demanded even more than that of Moses...' (4:153)

⁴⁶⁹ 'People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him.'

⁴⁷⁰ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol.6 p. 24

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 21--22

⁴⁷² Ibid., vol. 1, p. 42

understanding the meaning. According to him, the context of the passage on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* assists in understanding which group is being referred to in the passage.⁴⁷³

Terms such as *Mushrikīn* and *Kāfirūn* always refer to the pagans and non-believers, while *Mu'minūn* refers to those who have believed, whether as followers of the Prophet Muhammad or of previous Prophets and their revelations. The term '*Mu'minūn*', which is repeated twice in (Q 4: 162),⁴⁷⁴ refers to those who believed in their revelation before the advent of Islam and those who believed after it (i.e. following the period of revelation).⁴⁷⁵ In this case, they are praised and promised a reward for those among them who are well-versed in knowledge and believe in God and the Last Day.⁴⁷⁶ The verb '*kafara*' (disbelieve) is repeated twice in passages (Q 4: 67-68) and it describes the characteristics of those people of *kufr*, which intends to add more meanings to the term. The first description is of those who denied the truth in the Qur'an and barred others from the way of God; these people have indeed strayed far (Q 4: 167). The second description refers to those who denied the truth and took to wrongdoing, which led them astray.

Ibn 'Āshūr introduces two possible historical contexts and interpretations of the phrase '*alladhīna Kafarū*' (those who disbelieve). The first possibility is that the phrase is referring to the pagans or idol worshipers, for this is a common term used in the Qur'an to refer to them. Such people are misguided due to their own misdeeds and they will encounter an evil abode. The second possibility is that the phrase refers to the Children of Israel and their claims in the passages (Q 4:153-160). Therefore, the passage context, perhaps, proves this possible interpretation.⁴⁷⁷ Thus, it is to be noted that Ibn 'Āshūr's methodology of interpretation sometimes focuses on the context of the text and sometimes on the common usage of terms in the Qur'an.

In his interpretation of the passages (Q 3: 113-114) and (Q 5: 82-83), Ibn 'Āshūr maintains that the term *Muttaqīn* refers to the pious amongst the Jews and Christians, whose hearts were ready to receive guidance and who were dissatisfied with the

⁴⁷³ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 6- 24

⁴⁷⁴ *But those of them who are well grounded in knowledge and have faith do believe in what has been revealed to you (Muhammad), and in what was revealed before you— those who perform the prayers, pay the prescribed alms, and believe in God and the Last Day— to them We shall give a great reward.*

⁴⁷⁵ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol.6 p. 13-50

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., vol. 6. p. 25

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 46

religious practice of their people.⁴⁷⁸ The two groups mentioned in the previous two passages are referred to as *Muttaqīn* (pious). The description to piety can only be attributed if they believe and accept Islam. However, there is a possibility that it can also refer to the pious amongst the People of the Book, who did not become Muslims or believe in Islam. It may also refer to those who were dissatisfied with the conditions of their people and had a pure *Fiṭrah* and a readiness to receive guidance. Through this, they may attain salvation according to their knowledge and *Ijtihād* (i.e. independent reasoning).⁴⁷⁹

Ibn ‘Āshūr, in his interpretation to passages (Q 4: 153-173), commented on the critical discourse and the issues for which Jews and Christians were admonished – their disobedience to God’s instructions and their false claims. The Jews are addressed first, and they are reminded of the favours that God bestowed on them, as well as their ingratitude for these favours. The passages (Q 4: 171-173) address the Christians for their claims about the trinity and the status of Jesus. Ibn ‘Āshūr asserted that the term ‘*Ahl Al-Kitāb*’, here, refers to the Christians, and that the term ‘*ghuluww*’ denotes the tendency to exceed the limits of propriety in support of something. The sin of the Jews was that they had *ghuluww* in rejecting Jesus, whereas the sin of the Christians was in adopting the other extreme, having *ghuluww* in their devotion to Jesus.⁴⁸⁰

Ibn ‘Āshūr explains the discourse in passage (Q 4: 170) that is directed to all mankind – Jews, Christians, and Muslims included. It urges them to believe in the new message of truth and warns them against disbelief. Such general address aims at confirming the unity of the prophets’ call and introducing the new message to all of humanity.⁴⁸¹ In the following passage (Q 4: 171), the address and discourse is directed to the People of the Book, especially Christians, asking them to avoid excess in their religion and to refrain from elevating Jesus to the status of divinity. In his interpretation of this passage, Ibn ‘Āshūr states that the reason why the Qur’an addresses the Christians as ‘the People of the Book’ is to remind them of the Book they were commanded to follow. By doing this, the Qur’an indicates the disapproval with which God views

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 106-111

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., vol.6, p.13-51

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., vol. 6. p. 49

perverted actions, beliefs, and disobedience to His original instructions revealed in said Book.⁴⁸²

To support his viewpoint, Ibn 'Āshūr pointed to passage (Q 2: 4),⁴⁸³ where he presented three opinions to interpret the meaning of the passage. He quoted Ibn 'Abbās's narration that in the passage, those who believe refers to those from the People of the Book and pagan Makkans who believed in the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an. The second interpretation refers to every believer from the People of the Book. The third interpretation refers to everyone from any group. He further divided the term *Muttaqīn* in this passage into two categories. The first category believes in the unseen, establishes prayer, and spends in charity. The second category, which is higher than the former, believes in the previous revelation and what was revealed by God to Muhammad, perfecting the guidance sent to them by God. If they follow the Qur'anic guidance, they will be considered from the *Muttaqīn* and the successful.

However, not everyone declares belief in what has been mentioned in the passages, nor does everyone follow the guidance of the Qur'an. The believers in the Qur'an (i.e. Muslims) are in various categories and levels of practising their faith. Some claim they believe in the Qur'an and, when asked about it, they acknowledge it is undoubtedly the word of God. However, their deeds and actions do not reflect this professed belief, and are contrary to its teachings. For example, they are immersed in cheating, lying, backbiting, and spreading gossip. Ibn 'Āshūr maintains that the pronoun in the following passage (i.e. those) refers to the two categories; both are upon guidance and amongst the successful.⁴⁸⁴

Ibn 'Āshūr interprets the passages mentioning the People of the Book using a variety of methodologies. His exegesis reflected the People of the Book in three types of discourses: positive, negative, and polemical. In his commentary on passage (Q 2: 118),⁴⁸⁵ Ibn 'Āshūr considers some of the People of the Book as being in the same category as the pagans of Makkan and polytheists who worshipped idols, who claimed

⁴⁸² Ibid., p.50

⁴⁸³ '...those who believe in the revelation sent down to you(Muhammad), and in what was sent before you, those who have firm faith in the Hereafter. Such people are following their Lord's guidance and it is they who will prosper...' (Q 2: 4)

⁴⁸⁴ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984) vol. 1, p. 237-42

⁴⁸⁵ '...Those who have no knowledge also say, 'If only God would speak to us!' or 'If only a miraculous sign would come to us!' People before them said the same things: their hearts are all alike. We have made Our signs clear enough to those who have solid faith....(Q 2: 118)

that angels were the daughters of God. He also considers this passage as being a continuation of the discourse in passage (Q 2:116).⁴⁸⁶ Therefore, he placed factions of the People of the Book and the pagans in the same category. This was due to their practice of polytheism (*shirk*) when they claimed that God had a son and considered the son as being divine. In the same context, he referred to another passage discussing their requests from their messengers to bring signs from God before they believed – when the Jews asked Moses to see God and the Christians asked Jesus to bring a Table from heaven.⁴⁸⁷ He also considers another group of them as believers and put them in the same status as Muslims.⁴⁸⁸ In his interpretation of passages Q 4: 123-124, for example, Ibn ‘Āshūr maintained that belief in One God and doing good deeds are the main measure for attaining success and reward. Whoever follows the guidance of God, whether Jewish or Christian or Muslim, will be succeeded and be saved, and whoever goes astray will lose and fail. He holds that the verse is a judge between all groups of faith.

However, he also mentioned other possible interpretations. Similarly, he believes that passage (Q 28: 52-54) refers to a group of Jews and Christians who lived before the revelation of the Qur’an. He also mentioned another meaning which refers to a group of the People of the Book who believed in the message of the Qur’an as they knew of its coming.⁴⁸⁹ It is evident that the three forms of discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* are referred to by Ibn ‘Āshūr and interpreted the passages related to them through employing the textual context and the Arabic grammar and rhetoric to define each group of *Ahl Al-Kitāb*. This fluctuating discourse returns to the attitude of each group of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* toward God’s message. It becomes positive discourse if their attitude and reaction towards God’s message is positive; and becomes negative discourse if their attitude is negative; and it becomes polemical when they have polemical attitude.

5.7. The Torah and the Gospel in Ibn ‘Āshūr’s Exegesis

Ibn ‘Āshūr explains the definition of the Torah and Gospel, the origin of the terms, and the Qur’anic discourse about them. For him, *Tawrāh*, ‘Torah’, which is a divine Book

⁴⁸⁶ ‘They have asserted, ‘God has a child.’ May He be exalted! No! Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him...’ (Q 2: 116)

⁴⁸⁷ MS: Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 1, p. 690

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 539

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 207

revealed to Moses , is a Hebrew name derived from *Tura*, meaning guidance. It could possibly be the name used for the scrolls which contained the Ten Commandments revealed to Moses in the Ṭūr Mountain. These scrolls are the origin and base of the law '*Sharī'ah*' that came to Moses in scrolls or books. Therefore, the name Torah comprises all the Books of Moses.⁴⁹⁰

The *Injīl*, or Gospel, is a name for the revelation which came to Jesus and was compiled by his companions. It is not of Arabic origin, but it is thought that the name had Byzantine origins. According to Al-Qurṭubī and Al-Tha'labī, the word came from the Syriac or Aramaic language. Ibn 'Āshūr suggests that the term might be subject to alteration, but that the correct opinion is that it had a Greek origin. He also stated that some scholars of exegesis and linguistics maintain that the word *Injīl* is an Arabic word derived from '*Al-Nujīf*', which means water that comes out from land.⁴⁹¹

These scriptures were revealed in intervals and over a set period of time, and no narration or proofs confirm that they were revealed at once. Ibn 'Āshūr maintains that all scriptures came from God in order to guide people and show them right and wrong, the lawful and unlawful. However, the guidance of the Torah and Gospel was not continuous. It ceased after the revelation of the Qur'an. That is why, the passage mentions '*min qabl*' (before).⁴⁹² The previous scriptures are an introduction to the revelation of the Qur'an, the completed word of God. According to Ibn 'Āshūr, the guidance of the previous scriptures was incomplete for mankind. Therefore, the guidance of the Qur'an came to complete it.⁴⁹³ However, Ibn 'Āshūr confirmed the guidance, truthfulness, and obligation of belief in the two previous scriptures. Furthermore, that belief does not negate the viewpoint that the Qur'an replaced their guidance and cancelled the rules and guidelines which contradicted it.⁴⁹⁴

In his commentary on passage (Q 42: 13),⁴⁹⁵ Ibn 'Āshūr presents various interpretations for the passage and demonstrated that God laid down for Muslims the

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., vol. 3, p.148-49

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² '*...Step by step, He has sent the Scripture down to you (Prophet) with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel, earlier as a guide for people and He has sent down the distinction (between right and wrong) (Q 3:4-5)*

⁴⁹³ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 3, p.149

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 738-39

⁴⁹⁵ '*...In matters of faith, He has laid down for you (people) the same commandment that He gave Noah, which We have revealed to you (Muhammad) and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus: 'Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it'– what you (Prophet) call upon the*

same commandments that He gave to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, peace be upon all of them. He views that all previous messages contained the undisputable principles of creed, such as monotheism and the attributes of God, and the five necessities.⁴⁹⁶ The religion of Islam contains similar, or the same, instructions laid down in the previous messages. For example, the previous religions called for monotheism, belief in the resurrection and the hereafter, God-fearingness, enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, and having high morals and manners.⁴⁹⁷ Moreover, the religion of Islam provided details of these instructions, extended the understanding of the principles of jurisprudence, and enhanced moderation and tolerance.⁴⁹⁸

Although Ibn ‘Āshūr upholds a consistent methodology in his exegetical approach to the Torah and Gospel, his commentary on some issues related to them varies. At times, he maintains that these scriptures have been cancelled after the revelation of the Qur’an. He’d also mention at times that the teachings of all divine scriptures, including the Qur’an, are similar or the same. He also states that the Qur’an came to perfect God’s guidance to humanity and their moral teachings, as the previous messages were incomplete. He emphasised that the belief in the Torah and Gospel were part of a Muslim’s belief, regardless of any alteration which the People of the Book may have invented in their words, meanings, or interpretations.⁴⁹⁹

Ibn ‘Āshūr refers to numerous possibilities of interpretation for the phrase ‘*yuḥarrifūn al-kalim*’ (altering the words). These include to deviate from the right meaning to the wrong one; or to change the intended meaning to a void meaning to satisfy vain desires; or to replace words with other words in order to comply with their whims.⁵⁰⁰ Ibn ‘Āshūr comments on Ibn ‘Abbās’s statement about the meaning of *Taḥrīf*, which is corruption of the interpretation as opposed to changing the words in the sacred text. He states that Ibn ‘Abbās claims this because it is the most common case of textual manipulation in human history – people do not change the words of books, but they change their interpretation. Therefore, Ibn ‘Āshūr maintains that the word *Taḥrīf* is employed to portray two meanings: a metaphorical (*Majāzī*) one referring to the

idolaters to do is hard for them; God chooses whoever He pleases for Himself and guides towards Himself those who turn to Him.’ (42:13)

⁴⁹⁶ The five necessities are: protection of religion, life, reason, honor, and wealth.

⁴⁹⁷ MS: Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 25, p. 50-52

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 75

⁵⁰⁰ MS: Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 6, p. 143

corruption in interpretation; and a literal meaning (*Ḥaqqīqī*) referring to altering the actual words.⁵⁰¹ Although Ibn ‘Āshūr does not give details whether the Qur’an intends the contemporary Gospels and Torah (i.e. the Old Testament or the New Testament) or not, he alludes to numerous references from them in his commentary. He used these references sometimes to support his views and interpretation to the Qur’anic text and sometimes to refute their accusations and claims.⁵⁰² However, he emphasised that the Torah and the Gospel intended in the Qur’an are the two original scriptures before the alteration.⁵⁰³

5.8. Moses and Jesus in Ibn ‘Āshūr’s Exegesis

Ibn ‘Āshūr considers Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, peace be upon them, as extenders of the religion of Abraham and his offspring. They all came with messages from God to humanity, but Muhammad’s message is the final one, hence it is the most detailed and is completed for all.⁵⁰⁴ Therefore, the revelation sent to Muhammad is superior to that of Moses and Jesus due to its universality. The other messages that came after Abraham were only guidance for their respective times and circumstances.⁵⁰⁵

In his commentary on passage (Q 2: 136), ‘... *We make no distinction between any of them, and we devote ourselves to Him...*’, Ibn ‘Āshūr interprets it as a response to those who believe, that belief in one messenger cannot be achieved with denial of other messengers and their defamation. In other words, this Qur’anic passage, according to him, is a response to an implied question: ‘How do you believe in all the Prophets? You should only believe in one.’ This question, he believes, may arise as a result of ignorance and fanaticism.⁵⁰⁶ He demonstrates this attitude as a regrettable consequence of human nature manifesting itself in religions, sects, ideologies, and parties. It was common in religion until the message of Islam came and cancelled it. Hence, the previous nations and religions did not believe in previous or later messengers or messages.⁵⁰⁷ He considered this text a response to Jews and

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.. vol. 6, p. 143-44

⁵⁰² Ibid., vol. 3, p. 252

⁵⁰³ Ibid., vol. 19, p. 192

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p.738

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid..

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., p.739

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

Christians who believe only in their prophets and disbelieve in those who came after them. The aim is to confirm the belief in prophets and messengers as a requirement, without distinction between them. According to Ibn 'Āshūr this does not negate the preference of some prophets over others (see Q 2: 253).⁵⁰⁸

Ibn 'Āshūr distinguishes between the role of prophets and the role of messengers in his commentary on (Q 2: 213), and he referred to Moses and Jesus as messengers. Their role was comprehensive, and they came with a divinely revealed book to give warning and glad tidings. Prophets were meant to be good examples for their people and guides to the way of the former messenger or message. According to Ibn 'Āshūr, Prophets also affirmed and followed the way of previous messengers and called people to believe in their messages. For example, Ismael, Isaac, and Jacob were prophets following the way of their father Abraham. Other Prophets sent to the Children of Israel after Moses affirmed and followed what he came with and called to the following of the Torah.⁵⁰⁹

Another example of the Qur'anic discourse on Moses and Jesus can be noted in *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, in the commentary on (Q 5: 19).⁵¹⁰ Ibn 'Āshūr views that the address in this passage is directed to the Jews and Christians, and that it aims to remind them of the warning and glad tidings that God revealed to Moses and Jesus following a break in the sequence of prophets. Those messengers came to explain the issues that became unclear for them during this period without revelation, lest they have the excuse on the Day of Judgment that no one came to give them a warning or glad tidings.⁵¹¹ They would claim that if they disobeyed or neglected the law, it would be because of the lack of a divine message. Guidance, in that scenario, would be nowhere to be found.⁵¹²

Ibn 'Āshūr clarified that Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are the most common names mentioned in the Qur'an. He believes that Noah's religion is the basis of all

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 307

⁵¹⁰ (...*People of the Book, Our Messenger comes to you now, after a break in the sequence of messengers, to make things clear for you in case you should say, 'No one has come to give us good news or to warn us.'* So someone has come to you, to give you good news and warn you: God has the power to do all things. (Q 5: 19)

⁵¹¹ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 6, p.158

⁵¹² Ibid., p.159

religions referring to passage (Q 4: 163), ‘*We have sent revelation to you (Prophet) as We did to Noah and the prophets after him...*’. Abraham’s religion is the origin of the *Ḥanīfiyyah* (pure monotheism) that spread amongst the Arab nation with the arrival of Ishmael. Moses’s religion is the most detailed religion on rules and guidelines. Finally, Jesus’s religion is the last religion before Islam.⁵¹³ Therefore, the address to Muhammad in this passage is to confirm that the revelation came to him as it came to previous notable prophets.⁵¹⁴ According to Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Ahl Al-Kitāb* will be regarded as believers and receive salvation if they follow their Messengers, Moses and Jesus. Like all other exegeses, the discourse of the Qur’an on Moses and Jesus in Ibn ‘Āshūr’s *Tafsīr* is to be described as positive take one form; while the discourse directed to their followers and people is ambivalent and takes the form of criticism for those who disbelieved and disobeyed them, or the form of praise for those who believe and obey.

5.9. Examples of Ibn ‘Āshūr’s Interpretation of Texts Related to *Ahl Al-Kitāb*

Three examples of discourses will explicate the Qur’anic discourse on the People of the Book in Ibn ‘Āshūr’s exegesis; and how he understands this discourse. These examples are selected to refer to the three types of discourse: positive, negative, and polemical. Although Ibn ‘Āshūr employs the necessary analyses of Arabic language, rhetoric, and syntax to determine the meaning of the Qur’anic text, the reader can understand his viewpoint as he demonstrates the reasons for the alternating attitude towards the People of the Book. The Qur’anic discourse invites them to return to belief and avoid disbelief, and to perform deeds of obedience. However, most of them are criticised for failing to comply.⁵¹⁵

5.9.1. Examples of Positive Discourse

There are many passages which contain praise and positive discourse about the People of the Book. Four passages in particular have been chosen to review Ibn ‘Āshūr comments.

In his commentary on (Q 2: 62), Ibn ‘Āshūr maintains that this passage is somewhat of an optimistic conclusion to previous passages about the Jews, the favours that God

⁵¹³ Ibid., vol. 25, pp. 50-52

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p 419

gave them, and their ingratitude. It aims to give hope and glad tidings to the good people, not only from Jews, but from other nations as well. This reference is only to those who believe in God and in the Last Day and do good deeds – those are the ones who will receive their reward from God.⁵¹⁶ He refers to a similar passage (Q 4: 162)⁵¹⁷ that praises a group of Jews and considers them believers, labelling them as a people of good, although he considers the word *‘inna alladhīna āmanū’* (those who have believed), to refer to those who believe in Muhammad’s message. He analyses the phrase *‘man āmana bi-llāh...’* (whoever believes in God) as a conditional phrase, which means that those groups – Jews, Christians, and Sabians – will be given their reward if they believed in God, the Last Day, and performed good deeds.

Ibn ‘Āshūr presents a number of analytical interpretations and considers the sincere Jewish and Christians, and the sincere believers from other groups, as believers who will be given a reward. He presents the twelve leaders who supported Moses as an example of such sincere people.⁵¹⁸ Ibn ‘Āshūr also points out another possible meaning of the phrase *‘man āmana bi-llāh’* and views that *āmana* here means complete belief, namely, belief in the message of Muhammad in addition to the previous ones, and that those who do not believe in the message of Muhammad when they receive it are considered unbelievers.⁵¹⁹ He rejected the claim that this passage is abrogated by the other passage in (Q 3: 85),⁵²⁰ because it would be inconsistent if we consider it abrogated; unless we consider the passage as referring to believers from the People of the Book and Sabians who believed in their messengers and Books with no alteration or change or disobedience, but died before Muhammad’s prophethood.⁵²¹ In this case, the interpretation is similar to the Prophet Muhammad’s statement about the person who would be given his reward twice: a man from the People of the Book who believed in the messenger who came to him and then believed in the message of Muhammad. Ibn ‘Āshūr speculates that those who claim the

⁵¹⁶ MS: Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 1, p. 530-532

⁵¹⁷ *‘But those of them who are well grounded in knowledge and have faith do believe in what has been revealed to you Muhammad), and in what was revealed before you– those who perform the prayers, pay the prescribed alms, and believe in God and the Last Day– to them We shall give a great reward. (Q 4:162)*

⁵¹⁸ MS: Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 1, p. 535-538

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.. vol. 1, P. 539

⁵²⁰ *‘If anyone seeks a religion other than (Islam) complete devotion to God, it will not be accepted from him: he will be one of the losers in the Hereafter....’ (Q 3:85)*

⁵²¹ MS: Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 1, p. 539

abrogation of the passage perhaps interpreted the passage as God giving them a chance or a waiting period until they received Muhammad's message. If they then refused his message, then passage (Q 3: 85) would apply to them. It seems that Ibn 'Āshūr agrees that People of the Book of modern times would be rewarded and saved if they believe in One God, in the Last Day and do good deeds, whether they have affiliation, to sects such as Protestant, Orthodox, or Reformer, Conservative, or not to any other groups of the Jews and Christians. In other words, those who remain on pure Judaism and pure Christianity can be called believers and will be righteous, rewarded and saved.

Another example of positive discourse on the People of the Book can be noted in (Q 3: 113-114).⁵²² Ibn 'Āshūr discusses the alternating discourse as a sign of the neutral tone and treatment by the Qur'an of the People of the Book and as a sign that they are not all alike. Although the historical context of the passage refers to the good people from the Jews before the advent of Jesus, it is fair to include the good people of the Christians before the advent of Muhammad, because they were, likewise, steadfast and obedient to the teachings of their religion.⁵²³ The term *ummah* means a group or a community, in this context, a community amongst the People of the Book. The word '*Qā'imā*' means steadfast or upright – they act upon revelation. God affirms the good characteristics of such groups of people with the statement '*ulā'ika min al-Ṣāliḥīn*' (Those are from the righteous) at the end of the passage in order to draw attention to the fact that they deserve these descriptions.⁵²⁴ Ibn 'Āshūr focused, again, on linguistic rhetorical analysis, without giving much details about how such groups from the People of the Book would be judged or alluding to their final destination.

In another example of positive discourse that appears in (Q 3: 199), Ibn 'Āshūr explains that this passage refers to a group from the People of the Book who believed in God and all revelations, the previous and the current. However, it seems that this group from the People of the Book were unknown and had to conceal their belief. If they were known, then the Qur'an would not simply refer to them as a group from the

⁵²² *But they are not all alike. There are some among the People of the Book who are upright, who recite God's revelations during the night, who bow down in worship, 114 who believe in God and the Last Day, who order what is right and forbid what is wrong, who are quick to do good deeds. These people are among the righteous 115 and they will not be denied (the reward) for whatever good...* (Q 3:113-114)

⁵²³ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 4, p. 58

⁵²⁴ Ibid., p. 57-58

People of the Book. He also presented other possible interpretations and a historical context for this passage. Regardless, he emphasised that God will reward them in this world and in the Hereafter. Ibn 'Āshūr's methodology in his exegesis, as previously elucidated, was to mention various interpretations of the text, and then give his own preference by supporting one of the interpretations he referred to. However, on this particular occasion, he did not follow this approach. He only refers to possible interpretations but does not support one or mention his own views. For instance, the first interpretation is that this passage meant Negus (Najāshī), the king of Abyssinia, who concealed his belief because of his people and did not participate in, and acknowledged the distortion of, their religion. Ibn 'Āshūr also refers to Ibn Abbās's narration that the occasion of revelation for this passage is the funeral prayer that Prophet Muhammad offered on Negus when he passed away, showing that this passage was revealed to confirm the noble status of the good people among *Ahl Al-Kitāb*.⁵²⁵ The second possible interpretation is that the passage meant a group of Jews and Christians who declared their belief publicly at the time of Muhammad, such as the Jew 'Abdullāh Ibn Salām, and the Christians of Najran who embraced Islam in Makkah.⁵²⁶

In another example of positive discourse found in his commentary on (Q 5: 82-84), Ibn 'Āshūr discussed the negative tone towards a group of the Jews, and the positive one towards the Christians.⁵²⁷ He explained what he felt were the main reasons for this criticism, listing the mistakes of that group of Jews: enmity to Islam, hypocrisy, disobedience, and rejection and envy of Muhammad's prophecy. Despite the positive discourse towards the Christians, Ibn 'Āshūr also referred to the mistakes of the Christians: disbelief, distortion to their religion, and disobedience. According to him, the term *Naṣārā* refers to those who remain on the pure Christianity and they are closer to '*alladhīna āmanū*' (the believers (i.e. Muslims)) because their characteristics were not of 'arrogance or pride', rather, they believed in God and his revelation. It might describe some groups of *Naṣārā* who possess these characteristics as well as the

⁵²⁵ Ibid., vol. 4, p. 207

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., vol.7, p. 5-6

Arab Christians at the time of Muhammad who enjoyed religious and moral values, such as Zuhair, Lubaid, Waraqah Ibn Nawfal, and others.⁵²⁸

Ibn 'Āshūr did not shed light on the word '*minhum*' (from them). He narrates views of other exegetes such as Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, and others who maintain that the text refers to a group of Christians originally from *Shām* (Syria) who were in Abyssinia and came with the Muslims who returned to Madinah with another sixty-two monks. These monks embraced Islam after listening to the Qur'an.⁵²⁹ This text is the only one which refers to this known incident (i.e. Christians embracing Islam at the time of Muhammad). No other known narration confirms any group of Christians' acceptance of Islam at that time. However, Ibn 'Āshūr mentioned in another commentary that a delegation of Christians converted to Islam before. Perhaps he meant this group of Christians in this passage. Moreover, it is possible that God informed His Prophet about a group of *Naṣārā* who believed in Muhammad privately and were unable to declare their belief publicly or meet him, Negus being one such individual.⁵³⁰

Ibn 'Āshūr views that some of the People of the Book are regarded as good people, and he describes them as believers because of their belief in God, the Last Day, and their performance of good deeds. Therefore, they would be rewarded in this world and in the Last Day. However, he does not explain whether they will receive salvation or not. The other issue in Ibn 'Āshūr's exegesis is that he views the word '*āmanū*' (They believed) as referring to Muslims only; although the Qur'an describes some groups from the People of the Book as having *īmān bi-llāh*, or belief in God.

5.9.2. Examples of Negative Discourse

Ibn 'Āshūr maintains that criticism and condemnation of the People of the Book for various reasons is found throughout the Qur'an (See Q 4: 153-157, 171; 5: 13, 59, 62, 66, 70, 80, 82; 2: 40-42, 83, 93; 4: 154; 57: 26-27). This negative rhetoric is not restricted to the People of the Book, it also includes Muslims when they disobey God's commandments. Sometimes, the Qur'an names Muslims as believers and criticises their mistakes, such as not practicing their religion, disobeying, backbiting, mocking,

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 8

⁵²⁹ Ibid., p. 6-9

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

gossip, lying, etc. Overall, the People of the Book are condemned for losing their way and breaking God's Law (Q 4: 171, 5: 77, 57: 26-27), for their disbelief in the message of Islam, for their disbelief in the Prophet Muhammad, for their false claims and allegations, and for following their whims and desires. In his commentary on (Q 4: 171-172), Ibn 'Āshūr states that the People of the Book mentioned in this passage refers to the Christians, and that the passage clearly referred to Jesus later. The passage forbids them from disobedience and breaking the rules, and it called them to follow the guidelines and the instructions of God. He interprets the exaggeration in religion, '*ghuluww fī al-Dīn*', as going beyond the acceptable limit. He considered their claim about Jesus's divinity and trinity as '*ghuluww*'. He maintains that the Jews practice *ghuluww* when they go beyond acceptable religious limits by breaking the law of the Torah and disbelieving in prophets such as Jesus and Muhammad, peace be upon them both.⁵³¹

Ibn 'Āshūr introduces detailed explanations of the concept of the trinity and how it originated, as well as of the claims of the divinity. He highlights differences between groups of priests on the status of Jesus and their stance on the Gospel. He also referred to other passages of the Qur'an which discuss the major matters over which Muslims and Christians differ.⁵³² The following passage (Q 4: 172) quotes Jesus and the Angels declaring themselves as the servants of God. Ibn 'Āshūr states that the reason for mentioning angels is that there are factions who have claimed that they are the daughters of God.⁵³³ In another example of negative discourse (Q 5: 59-63), the passage lists the mistakes and sins of the People of the Book and criticises them for the envy they harbour towards Muslims, their hypocrisy, committing sins, aggression, and unlawful earnings. Ibn 'Āshūr remarks that each characteristic is attributed to a group of them, specifically those who argue with Muslims.⁵³⁴

Another passage (Q 57: 26-27),⁵³⁵ combines both positive and negative rhetoric. Ibn 'Āshūr maintains that the criticism of the People of the Book in this passage is levelled

⁵³¹ Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 50-55

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 61

⁵³⁴ Ibid., vol. 6, p. 243

⁵³⁵ '*We sent Noah and Abraham, and gave prophethood and scripture to their offspring: among them there were some who were rightly guided, but many were lawbreakers. We sent other messengers to follow in their footsteps. After those We sent Jesus, son of Mary: We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers. But monasticism was something they invented—We did not ordain it for them—only to seek God's pleasure, and even so, they did not observe it properly.*

at those who deviate from the guidance of their Book and the path of Noah and Abraham. It also includes, he believes, those who went astray from amongst the pagan Arabs and Jews, but not the Christians, who are mentioned in the next passage. The phrase, '*and gave prophethood and scripture to their offspring*' refers to the prophethood and scripture given to their offspring (i.e. Hūd, Ṣālih, *Tubba'*, and the prophethood of Ishmael, Isaac, Shu'ayb, and Jacob). The scripture refers to the scrolls of Abraham and Noah, which contain the principles of their religion.⁵³⁶ The phrase, '*there were some who were rightly guided, but many were lawbreakers*' shows that there were those in these nations who followed the rules of the Books and the guidance of the prophets, while others disobeyed. Ibn 'Āshūr presents a detailed interpretation of these nations of prophets and messengers.⁵³⁷

Following his commentary on the conditions of previous prophets and their nations before Jesus era, Ibn 'Āshūr shed light on the next generation of messengers, Jesus, who came to the Children of Israel with a new Book, the Gospel. He showed the positive discourse in passage (Q 57: 27), which he felt was revealed about Christians who followed the teachings of Jesus (e.g. mercy and compassion) and the Gospel. Jesus came to the Children of Israel to soften their hard hearts, as described in passage (Q 2: 74),⁵³⁸ and teach them a morality based on mercy. The criticism in the passage for the People of the Book is directed to them when they neglected an innovated monasticism, which was not decreed for them.⁵³⁹ Then, Ibn 'Āshūr again qualifies the phrase '*ātayna alladhīna āmanū minhum*' (*So We gave a reward to those of them who believed...*) as being about the believers in one God and his messengers who did not spoil this belief with blasphemous beliefs such as the divinity of Jesus or his Sonship to God. This, according to him, is applicable for all time. Those who hold incorrect beliefs from the Christians are the majority, that is why he held that the Qur'an says '*kathīrun minhum fāsiqūn*' (the majority of them are lawbreakers).⁵⁴⁰ Ibn 'Āshūr

So We gave a reward to those of them who believed, but many of them were lawbreakers. (Q 47: 26-27)

⁵³⁶ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 27, p. 419-420

⁵³⁷ Ibid., vol. 27, p 419

⁵³⁸ *Even after that, your hearts became as hard as rocks, or even harder, for there are rocks from which streams spring out, and some from which water comes when they split open, and others which fall down in awe of God: He is not unaware of what you do.*

⁵³⁹ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 27 p. 420-424

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 425-26

regarded this discourse as a praise to the previous sincere Christians before the advent of Muhammad.⁵⁴¹

It can be noted that the negative Qur'anic discourse in the previous passages, whether referring to the Jews or Christians, does not include all of them. Most of the previous passages include distinguishing words or phrases like '*minhum*' (some of them) (Q 4: 160-162), '*kathīran minhum*' (most of them) (Q 5: 60-62), '*illā qalīlan minhum*' (except a few of them), '*aktharakum*' (the majority of them), '*minhum muhtadin wa khathīrun minhum fāsiqūn*' (some of them are guided but the majority are transgressors) (Q 57: 26), '*fa ātayna alladhīna āmanū minhum ajrahum wa khathīrun minhum fāsiqūn*' (So We gave a reward to those of them who believed, but many of them were lawbreakers. (Q 57: 27)). It seems that Ibn 'Āshūr does not differ much in his interpretation of the passages related to the People of the Book, as he maintains that the Qur'anic treatment to them is based on their belief, behaviour, and actions. The Qur'anic discourse invites them to return to belief and avoid disbelief, and to perform deeds of obedience. However, most of them are criticised for failing to comply.⁵⁴² It also seems that Ibn 'Āshūr alludes that each mistake or sin or disobedience have been committed by different group within Judaism or Christianity. In other words, not all of the Jews believe in Ezra divinity, nor all Christians believe in Jesus divinity; not all Jews are hypocrites; nor all Christians are hypocrites; not all Jews disobeyed Moses of the Torah; and not all Christians disobeyed Jesus or the Gospel.

5.9.3. Examples of Polemical Discourse

Ibn 'Āshūr reviews some polemical issues with Jews and Christians in passages (Q 3: 59-76), which discuss the arguments around major issues regarding creed. An example of this is Jesus's supposed divinity and his creation (Q 3: 59). Ibn 'Āshūr employs his linguistic analysis to elaborate his viewpoints and to confirm the similarities between the creation of Adam and Jesus, peace be upon them both. This employment of semantic and morphological analysis has had a positive and negative impact on the interpretation of the passage. The positive is that it helps the exegete reach the intended revealed meaning through linguistic understanding; while the negative impact is that it diverts the reader away from the spirit of the passage. With

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p. 426

⁵⁴² Ibid., p 419

the latter perspective, focusing on the rules of Arabic language takes space that the exegesis would have filled with other material. Through his deep understanding of Arabic language, Ibn 'Āshūr reaches his interpretation and the exegesis of the passage.⁵⁴³

In his commentary on passage (Q 3: 61-101), Ibn 'Āshūr explains the polemical discourse and address in these passages. It refers sometimes to the Christians (Q 3: 61-62), sometimes to the Jews (Q 3: 69-74), and sometimes to both of them (Q 3: 65-66).⁵⁴⁴ This discourse employed various styles of dialogue towards the Jews and Christians. For instance, the respectful style of dialogue invites them to reach common ground through the worship of One God, without associating partners with Him (Q 3: 64-66). It also invites them to find a fair stance of argumentation and judgment on the issues they differ on, such as the status of Jesus, by acknowledging that he was a human created by God, like Adam (Q 3: 59).⁵⁴⁵ The other notable style of polemical discourse is condemnation, which is common in the Qur'an and is employed in passage (Q 3: 67). It refutes the claims about Abraham's status in terms of his faith, the enmity of some Jews to Muslims and Muhammad,⁵⁴⁶ disbelief in God's signs, mixing the truth with falsehood and hiding revelation,⁵⁴⁷ breaking oaths, and disbelieving in the new message of Muhammad and the Qur'an. Ibn 'Āshūr views that a sarcastic questioning style that condemns a group of the People of the Book is utilised in the polemical discourse in passage (Q 3: 86). Ibn 'Āshūr starts his discussion over the phrase '*Kaifa yahdi-llāhu Qawman*' (why would God guide a people (i.e. From *Ahl Al-Kitāb*) ...). This comes in a sarcastic and condemning form. He suggested that perhaps the question here refers to a style of exclusion, which means that such a group from the People of the Book are excluded from guidance. How can God guide

⁵⁴³ MS: Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990) vol. 3, p. 263

⁵⁴⁴ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), p. 264-304

⁵⁴⁵ Say, 'People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.' If they turn away, say, 'Witness our devotion to Him.' People of the Book, why do you argue about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospels were not revealed until after his time? Do you not understand? You argue about some things of which you have some knowledge, but why do you argue about things of which you know nothing? (5:64-66)

⁵⁴⁶ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 3, 278

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 278- 283

people who once believed after they received clear signs and still turned away?! Surely God does not guide the wrong-doers.⁵⁴⁸

In passage (Q 2: 135), Ibn 'Āshūr shows the polemical aspects of the Qur'anic discourse on the People of the Book. He explains that this is a response to the claims of the Jews and the Christians that true guidance is with them. The response came to them that guidance is in the *millah* (i.e. religion or way) of Abraham and what was revealed to all the messengers and prophets. Ibn 'Āshūr states that this response reveals the greatness of Islam, that it acknowledges belief in all previous revelation and prophets. He holds that the intended meaning behind the imperative in passage (Q 2: 136) with the verb 'say' is to declare the teachings which comply with the new religion containing justice and fairness.⁵⁴⁹ This fairness and justice encourages others to accept it, and it is a clear response to the claim that guidance is only in Christianity or Judaism. Ibn 'Āshūr also affirms that Muslims do not deny the message of Moses, Jesus, or any of the other prophets, neither do they belie them. Rather, they accept what God revealed and submit to His will. This has remained the core of the religion of Abraham and is the core of Islam today. Islam came as a confirmation of previous messages and as a detailed elaboration and completion of all divine religions.

According to Ibn 'Āshūr, the previous messages that were sent were suitable for their time and conditions, unlike Islam, which came to fulfil and perfect all previous messages, books, and prophets, for all times and nations.⁵⁵⁰ Despite there being a confirmation of, and belief in, previous messages, the message of Islam cancels the teachings of the previous scriptures which disagree with it.⁵⁵¹ In this matter he differs from Riḍā, for Ibn 'Āshūr considers Islam as a religion which remained intact and one which is an extension of the religion of Abraham, while Judaism and Christianity are considered specific to a historical time and nation.⁵⁵²

Commenting on passage (Q 2: 139)⁵⁵³, he maintains that it is directly addressed to the People of the Book who argued with Muslims about God's essence and the

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 303

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 738

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 738

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., p. 29

⁵⁵² Ibid., p. 738

⁵⁵³ *Say (Prophet) (to the Jews and Christians), 'How can you argue with us about God when He is our Lord and your Lord? Our deeds belong to us, and yours to you. We devote ourselves entirely to Him. Or are you saying that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians?'*

truthfulness of the new message of Islam. The response interpreted by Ibn 'Āshūr was: 'Your only proof is your claim that God preferred you above all, although He is our Lord and your Lord, and your deeds belong to you and ours to us. The preference and guidance are not only with you, the measure of preference is the quality of deeds'. That is why, he holds, that the passage mentions, 'Our deeds belong to us and yours to you'. He gives an example that is similar to passages (Q 34: 24) and (Q 109: 6). He then remarks that the preference is for true Muslims because of their sincerity to God (*mukhliṣūn*), and because they do not associate partners with Him in worship.⁵⁵⁴ Referring to passage (Q 2: 136), Ibn 'Āshūr demonstrates that the Muslim belief is in God, in revelation, and in the prophets, as well as in the unity of all previous messengers and revelations in their message – there is no distinction between them in that respect. Then, in the end of the passage, '*wa naḥnu laḥū Muslimūn*' (we (Muslims) are submitters to Him).⁵⁵⁵ Both passages end with this similar affirmation, '*wa naḥnu laḥū Muslimūn*' and '*wa naḥnu laḥū mukhliṣūn*', emphasising that the passage is directed to those who submit, are sincere, and act upon the guidance. A large section of *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* discusses debates and claims made by the People of the Book and the response of the Qur'an towards to them.

Ibn 'Āshūr employs a rhetorical analysis in his commentary of passage ('*wa min Ahl Al-Kitāb*' (Q 3: 75)⁵⁵⁶ in order to demonstrate the exclamation and wonderment (*uslūb ta'ajjub*) of the two opposite characteristics of the People of the Book. The first exclamation is at the first characteristic of the People of the Book; that is, sincere honesty and trustworthiness despite an ability to betray and cheat. The second exclamation is at the betrayal of those who follow the Scripture.⁵⁵⁷ In other words, the two exclamations in the passage are: how honest are such a group of people of the People of the Book when they are entrusted with something despite the potential for

(Prophet), ask them, 'Who knows better: you or God? Who could be more wicked than those who hide a testimony (they received) from God? God is not unmindful of what you do.' That community passed away: what they earned belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you. You will not be answerable for their deeds. (Q 2:139-142)

⁵⁵⁴ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), p. 739

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 739

⁵⁵⁶ There are People of the Book who, if you (Prophet) entrust them with a heap of gold, will return it to you intact, but there are others of them who, if you entrust them with a single dinar, will not return it to you unless you keep standing over them. (Q 3:75)

⁵⁵⁷ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol.3, p. 285

treachery; the second, how evil are those who betray when they are entrusted despite having the Book guiding them and forbidding them from betrayal.⁵⁵⁸

Ibn 'Āshūr opines that the polemics concerning the People of the Book are different from those concerning the pagans and atheists. This is given the fact that they have similar belief and are knowledgeable due to them having had Divine Books.⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, it is easier for Muslims to argue with the People of the Book than it is for them to argue with pagans and atheists. However, if they are devoid of good manners and sound knowledge, then the polemics with them are different, hence the exemption of those who show arrogance and pride.⁵⁶⁰ He adds that polemics or arguments of the People of the Book with Muhammad and Muslims concerning the signs of God are disliked because their argumentation is a form of denying God and His signs.⁵⁶¹ This indicates that this type of negative argumentation is sometimes practised by pagans, atheists, and polytheists. The context determines the type of argument and polemics. Therefore, this is considered a lesson for Muslims, and it is highly recommended for them to avoid such arguments or polemics with polytheists.

Akin to other exegetes, Ibn 'Āshūr affirms the varying attitude towards the People of the Book in the Qur'anic discourse. The analysis he made to the passages on the Jews and Christians demonstrates the ambivalent tone in these passages and can be described as neutral. It also demonstrates that their portrayal and treatment varies between condemnation and praise, between positive remarks and negative remarks. It praises those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds, and criticises those who disbelieve, distort the scripture, and disobey the rules and laws of God and His prophets. This fluctuating discourse returns to the attitude of each group of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* toward God's message. It becomes positive discourse if their attitude and reaction towards God's message is positive; and becomes negative discourse if their attitude is negative; and it becomes polemical when they have polemical attitude.

Ibn 'Āshūr also stresses that this discourse does not include all, as they are not all alike, each group will be accountable according to the level of deeds and belief, regardless of the affiliation. Ibn 'Āshūr was not clear when he declares that there being a

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 285

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., vol. 21, p. 6

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 6-7

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 82

confirmation of, and belief in, previous messages, and also completion to it, and in other place he declares that the message of Islam cancels the teachings of the previous scriptures. According to him, the previous messages that were sent were suitable for their time and conditions, unlike Islam, which came to complete all previous messages for all times and nations. This might be seen by readers as contradiction, however, he might interpret such passages relying on the historical contexts and occasions of revelation, or the various use of Arabic grammar and rhetoric.

His analysis to this discourse demonstrates the reasons for the negative, positive and polemical discourse by referring to the historical contexts, the usual usage of terms, Arabic rhetoric, and the possible interpretation of the passages. Ibn 'Āshūr's method of interpreting passages related to the People of the Book differs slightly from that of 'Abdu and Riḍā. Ibn 'Āshūr relied on traditions and linguistic style while remaining largely adherent to the mainstream of classical exegeses. 'Abdu and Riḍā employed modern language and referred to the status quo and challenges facing Muslim nations during their time.

Ibn 'Āshūr placed some groups from the People of the Book and the pagans in the same category. This was due to their practice of polytheism (*shirk*) when they claimed that God had a son and considered the son as being divine. He also considers another group of them as believers and put them is the same status as Muslims.⁵⁶² From his analysis, it seems that Ibn 'Āshūr views that belief in One God and doing good deeds are the main measure for attaining success and reward (Q 4: 123-124). Whoever follows the guidance of God, whether Jewish or Christian or Muslim, will be succeeded and be saved, and whoever goes astray will lose and fail. He holds that the verse is a judge between all groups of faith. However, he also mentioned other possible interpretations to these passages. Similarly, he believes that passage Q 28: 52-54 refers to a group of Jews and Christians who lived before the revelation of the Qur'an. He also mentioned another meaning which refers to a group of the People of the Book who believed in the message of the Qur'an as they knew of its coming.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶² Ibid., vol. 1, p. 539

⁵⁶³ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 207

6. CHAPTER SIX

The People of the Book in the Exegesis of Sha'rāwī

Introduction

Sha'rāwī is considered one of the revival and renewal movement leaders in Qur'anic exegesis, an extension to 'Abdu's and Afghani's school. Sha'rāwī's contribution is categorically a new style of exegesis that is suitable for the public in modern-day Egypt and Muslims around the world, catering for educated and uneducated audiences. He was known for elaborating on the inimitability of the Qur'an, its beautiful rhetoric, and subtle subjects preserved in its message. This was apparent in the traditional manner he delivered his lessons and lectures – via TV and radio – to reach every house in the Arab world. He preferred to call this style '*Khawāṭir*' (reflections), not exegesis.⁵⁶⁴

Several studies have been conducted on Sha'rāwī's methodology, his writings, and his refutations of the misconceptions about Islam and its teachings. The majority of these studies are in Arabic and for the Arab world. Very few western books have been authored recently on Sha'rāwī, and they have included him as one of the modernists of Egypt.⁵⁶⁵

Sha'rāwī's aim was to show the connection between Qur'anic exegesis and the reality of peoples' circumstances, removing the false dichotomy between the two, which had existed for many centuries. This prolonged isolation of religious tradition away from the contemporary human paradigm left a negative impact on people's belief and commitment to God. He criticised the separation between the intellectual and political leadership – each leader followed a different path, decreasing the impact of scholars and intellectuals on people's lives.⁵⁶⁶ He also criticised the scholars for isolating themselves from the people and ignoring the important and practical issues they need to lead godly lives, instead, focusing on tangential theoretical issues. In addition, he felt that their focus on academic issues relating to the Arabic language, philosophy, theology, and jurisprudence took them away from the main purpose of exegesis, which

⁵⁶⁴ Kāfī, Maṣṣūf, *Al-Sheikh Muhammad Mutwallī Al-Sha'rāwī wa Manhajuhu fī Al-Tafsīr*, (Algeria: As-Sirat Magazine, Kulliyat al-'Ulum al-Islamiyah, 2006), p. 112-154

⁵⁶⁵ Brinton, G. Jacqueline *'Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt'* (Oakland, University of California Press, 2016)

⁵⁶⁶ Al-Qamihi, 'Uthman, *Muhammad Mutwallī Al-Sha'rāwī wa Manhajuhu fī Al-Tafsīr*, (Cairo: Dar Alsalam: 2013), p. 151-154

is understanding the guidance of the Qur'an.⁵⁶⁷ Moreover, he felt that the increase in sectarian doctrines swayed the exegetical tradition towards sectarian interpretations.

Sha'rāwī also tried to refute the false claims and accusations made against the Qur'an, Sunnah, and other Islamic issues which secularists and non-Muslims raised. He responded to the claim that Islam is not a valid way of life, for which he accused the accusers of carrying out invalid research and said that, had they extended it, they would discover that Islam is a complete system and that no other systems surpass it.⁵⁶⁸ Sha'rāwī's *Khawāṭir* is also distinguished for the thorough discussions on the passages related to the People of the Book. His work about *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Stories of Prophets) is full of reflections on Qur'anic passages which highlight the discourse about the actions of the Jews with their prophets and messengers. Similarly, in his work on Mary and Jesus, Sha'rāwī analysed the Qur'anic discourse on the *Naṣārā*, Jesus, and Mary. This chapter will investigate the Qur'anic discourse on the People of the Book in Sha'rāwī's exegesis and analyse the passages related to them and demonstrate Sha'rāwī's reflections on them.

6.1. The Life of Sha'rāwī

Muhammad Mutawallī Al-Sha'rāwī was born on April 16th 1911 and raised in the Daqahliyyah province, Daqadous village, in Egypt. He studied in religious institutes in Zaḳāzīq, where he memorised the Qur'an by the age of 10. Sha'rāwī was convinced that he would take after his father and become a farmer. He got married at an early age and had five children. He was enrolled in Al-Azhar College of Arabic Language and graduated in 1941, after which he applied for a degree in teaching.⁵⁶⁹

Sha'rāwī's journey to becoming a scholar is much like the journey of other scholars of Egypt. His interest in politics was different and was something which other scholars of his time did not share. In the 1930s, he participated in a student uprising, his vision of an independent Egypt led him to become a member of the nationalist Wafd party. In 1938, he attended a celebration of the memory of Sa'd Zaghlūl.⁵⁷⁰ This party's ideas

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 152

⁵⁶⁸ Suleiman, Abdil-Basit, *Juhud Al-Sheikh Al-Sha'rāwī fī Ad-Difa' an Al-Islam*, (Egypt, Zaqaqiz, Arabic Faculty, 2013), p. 2498-2361

⁵⁶⁹ Brinton, G. Jacqueline 'Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt' (Oakland, University of California Press, 2016), p. 31

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 32

influenced Sha'rāwī, he regarded the party's nationalism to be compatible with Islam. Later, the Wafd party began to lose support due to the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood and Nationalist Party. Sha'rāwī became a member of the Muslim brotherhood, but this was a short lived experience, and he later criticised their impatience.⁵⁷¹ Sha'rāwī remained true to the idea of the Wafd party – all Egyptians were equal, despite religious affiliation. Consequently, he did not fit in with the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵⁷²

In 1943, Sha'rāwī received his teaching certificate and was later appointed as a teacher in the religious institutes of Tanta, then Zaḡāzīq, and then in Alexandria. In 1950, and after several years of teaching in Egypt, Sha'rāwī went to Saudi Arabia to teach and work as a professor in King 'Abd Al-'Aziz university in Makkah. He taught theology and Law, even though his original degree was in Arabic language.⁵⁷³ During the reign of Nasser, he had a disagreement with King Saud in 1963 due to which Nasser prevented him from teaching in Saudi Arabia. In the meantime, he was appointed as director of the office of Shaykh Al-Azhar. Shortly after, Sha'rāwī fell out with Nasser on his communist ties with Russia. Communism does not recognise religion, therefore, Sha'rāwī voiced his reluctance to support such an association and condemned Nasser's political agenda with Russia and the communist society. Consequently, Sha'rāwī was sent to Algeria as head of Al Azhar graduate to help the government re-establish the primacy of the Arabic language. During his time there, he met Sheikh Muhammad Belkaid of the Hibriyyah *Ṣūfī* order.⁵⁷⁴ As a preacher, he became popular in Algeria. The mosques used to overflow with audience members coming to listen to his charismatic sermons.

In 1976, he returned to Egypt on the order of Sadat who appointed him as the minister of religious endowments. Sadat supported Sha'rāwī, servicing his own political agenda to merge the identity of the Egyptian people with their religion and nationality. However, due to the corruption Sha'rāwī witnessed as a government official, he resigned from the post.⁵⁷⁵ Sha'rāwī received his breakthrough to stardom in the

⁵⁷¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-sheikh-mohamed-mutwali-sharawi-1165880.html>

⁵⁷² Brinton, G. Jacqueline 'Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt' (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), p. 32-33

⁵⁷³ Ibid., p. 35

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 37

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 38

1970's, when he took part in the country's first ever Islamic television religious discussion programme. He appeared as a guest on multiple occasions on a TV show called '*Nūr 'alā Nūr*' (Light upon Light). His lessons and traditional views, interspersed with jokes, were especially attractive to the lower and middle classes.⁵⁷⁶ He died on 17th June 1998 in Egypt.

Many studies and pieces of research in Arabic have been conducted about Sha'rāwī's exegesis and his methodology; for instance, 'Theology in Sheikh Sha'rāwī's Thought' is a study carried out by 'Umar Rajab in Al-Azhar University, who discussed Sha'rāwī's contribution in explaining Islamic creed and refuting orientalist claims and attacks. Another PhD study by Sudanese researcher 'Umar Al-Salehi under the heading '*Sheikh Sha'rāwī's School of Tafsīr*' concluded that Sha'rāwī's exegesis is comprehensive, as it covers various subjects related to creed, morality, acts of worship, and dealings and transactions. The researchers also concluded that Sha'rāwī's *Tafsīr* contains methodologies of various schools of exegesis in which one can find linguistic, juristic, scientific, and spiritual approaches. Moreover, he was not a *muqallid* or a traditionalist, but a *Mujtahid* and a modernist.

Another study is titled '*Manhaj Al-Shaykh Al-Sha'rāwī fi Tafsīrihī wa Muqāranatuhū bi Manāhij al-Mufasssīrīn Al-Mu'aṣṣirīn*' (Sheikh Sha'rāwī's Approach in his Exegesis and Comparing it With the Modern Exegetes' Approaches) by Muhammad Al-Tijānī who urged for the academic investigation of Sha'rāwī's exegesis. He did so, suggesting two different types of study: analytical and comparative. The analytical study should focus on a deep survey of modern innovation and methodology in his exegesis; while the comparative study should focus on the similarities and differences between him and other Arab exegetes in order to place him in his proper position amongst other contemporary exegetes. He equates Sha'rāwī and Al-Marāghī in terms of their relying on traditions, but he prefers the former's exegesis due to his choosing what he felt were the sounder and wiser opinions. Moreover, he avoids the errors found in the exegeses of Ṭanṭāwī Jawahrī, Muhammad 'Abdu, Rashīd Riḍā, Marāghī, Ibn 'Āshūr, Sayyid Quṭb, and Al-Ṣabūnī.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁶ Doorn-Harder, Nelly van, "Teaching and Preaching the Qur'an", in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Consulted online on 05 October 2017 <http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_00201>

⁵⁷⁷ <http://www.alhayat.com/Articles/11351106/مكانة-تفسير-الشعراوي-بين-المفسرين>

6.2. Sha'rāwī's Contribution

Sha'rāwī is regarded as one of the most influential personalities in the modern Islamic era, amongst the likes of Rashīd Riḍā, 'Abdu, Al-'Aqqād (d. 1965 CE), Al-Ghazālī (d. 1996 CE), and Al-Rafī'ī (d. 1937 CE), all of whom enlightened the minds of people in Egypt. He presented his views on Islamic issues to people in a soft image. He was able to gather many attractive traits in his preaching, combining depth and ease, accuracy of understanding, pleasant presentation and analysis, innovation and concurrent scientific references.⁵⁷⁸ One of the most prominent features of the intellectual tendency of Sha'rāwī was modernism and innovation.⁵⁷⁹

Sha'rāwī's main aim was to direct and enlighten people about the teaching of Islam, and to reconnect the hearts of people to their Creator, making them realise the importance of having a direct and personal relationship with God. He did so by reasserting the notion that the Qur'an is eternally applicable. He further believed in, and promoted, the Qur'an's ability to provide relevant knowledge, which human beings require at all times and places. Sha'rāwī maintains that the crucial function of Islam is to support individuals in understanding every action in every moment of life according to God's will and universal justice.⁵⁸⁰

Sha'rāwī staunchly called for the renewal of Qur'anic exegesis. He believed that, although a Qur'anic passage may have been explained in the past, reinterpretation for every new generation and region is a requirement and need. This is because of the change in the human condition, not a deficiency in the Divine Book (i.e. Qur'an). It can apply to a changing world and offer solutions for the issues of humanity, attesting to the concept of 'eternal application'.⁵⁸¹ Sha'rāwī states in this regard, 'Evidence about the truth of the universe has been hidden (in the Qur'an) for fourteen centuries, and has only recently begun to yield its scientific information. The meaning remained uncovered for the human intellect until the present. As I have said, the Qur'an bestows renewed (*mutajaddid*) information in the (following) passages: 'We shall show them

⁵⁷⁸ Yunis, Abdel-Dayem, *Muhammad Mitwallī Al-Sha'rāwī Sha'iran wa Naqidan*, (Egypt: Faculty of Arabic Language, Al-Azhar University 2012) vol.1, p. 39-81

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Brinton, G. Jacqueline 'Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt' (Oakland, University of California Press, 2016), p. 90; and see Muhammad Mitwallī Sha'rāwī, *Muhammad Mitwallī al-Sha'rāwī Hawla al-Quran al-Karīm*, vol.I (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), 55-56

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 94-95

Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth...' (Q 41:53) We must pay attention here to the letter (س) in the phrase '*We shall show them*' (*sanurīhim*), because it indicates the future tense. But the future, here, has no ending mentioned; instead, it indicates future generations that will come after, until the end of time.⁵⁸²

He is amongst those contemporary exegetes who supported elements of Qur'anic scientific interpretation and viewed that scientific knowledge needs to be understood in light of the Qur'an, for the Qur'an contains unlimited knowledge which can serve humanity. The Qur'an has not retired from revealing new information. Those who are able to interpret it correctly are able to provide Muslims with a renewed understanding of its passages.⁵⁸³ Prophet Muhammad provided different answers to the same question based on the context and situation. This did not mean he had abandoned God's revelation, rather it is revelation itself that provided such diversity. Sha'rāwī felt that those scholars who claim to follow the teachings of Prophet Muhammad should also follow his method when interpreting the Qur'an.⁵⁸⁴

Sha'rāwī employed simplicity to demonstrate, in a positive manner, the relationship between man and God. He mostly commented on the positive aspects of this relationship, and on rare occasions he would mention the negative consequences of neglecting one's duty towards God. Sha'rāwī did not present himself as a legal scholar, nor did he present Islam in legal forms and moral categories. He emphasised that it is a moral and individual duty of every human being to behave in a manner that is pleasing to God. For Sha'rāwī, this is achieved through reinterpreting the Qur'an to understand the truth concerning present contingencies.⁵⁸⁵ Prophet Muhammad said, 'At the beginning of every century, God will send to this community (*Ummah*) some or one who will renew religion (*yujaddid dīnaha*)'⁵⁸⁶ This statement means every century the Muslim community will be purified from human propensity and straying from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. The one in charge of renewing does not bring anything new to the religion of Islam, rather, he lifts the veils off a society that has

⁵⁸² Ibid., p. 95

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Brinton, G. Jacqueline 'Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt' (Oakland, University of California Press, 2016), p. 95

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 97

⁵⁸⁶ MS: Al-Sijistānī, Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Risalah, 2009), No. 4291.

strayed and does away with practices and beliefs which do not conform with the authentic sources (i.e. the Qur'an and the Sunnah). The responsibilities of this individual include: reinterpreting scripture, defending tradition, transmitting interpretive knowledge to the public, and, especially, making independent judgments about legal or theological issues to derive new rules.⁵⁸⁷

The show covered his thoughts (*Khawāṭir*) regarding various topics in light of the Qur'an and Sunnah. He was known as the 'Television Preacher', and continued preaching the Qur'anic message until he fell ill and eventually died in 1998.⁵⁸⁸ Because of his unique style and popularity, Sha'rāwī influenced the Egyptian people in general, but former film stars and belly dancers in particular. Those stars decided to leave their professions – often including immoral acts – and chose to wear Hijab.⁵⁸⁹ His preaching played a pivotal role in moving Egyptian society forward to higher God-consciousness and moral awareness. While other Islamic intellectuals left a wealth of books and essays, which scholars can study for generations to come, Sha'rāwī's legacy is the cassettes and video tapes of him preaching. He wrote the following books: *Isrā'* and *Mi'rāj*; Secrets In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful; Islam and Modern Thinking; Islam and Women; Curriculum and Religion; Prayers and Pillars of Islam; The Path to God; Islamic Verdicts Fatāwa; Hundred Questions and Answers in the Islamic Fiqh; The Woman as God Desires; The Miracle of Qur'an; and This is Islam.

6.3. The Exegesis of Sha'rāwī

Sha'rāwī is branded by secularists and liberals as a conservative scholar, and he is seen by 'Ulama and religious people as a modern and rationalist scholar, as his methodology relies more on rationalism.⁵⁹⁰ He is also considered as an extension to the school of Muhammad 'Abdu, and is considered by some to be the *Mujtahid* of the 20th century. Sha'rāwī refused to call his work *Tafsīr*, rather, he called it '*Khawāṭir ḥawla al-Qur'an*' (reflections on the Qur'an). When he was asked about that, he said: 'Because the Qur'an cannot be interpreted by a person. If God willed for the Qur'an to

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 88 - 89

⁵⁸⁸ Brinton, G. Jacqueline 'Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt' (Oakland, University of California Press, 2016), p. 38

⁵⁸⁹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-sheikh-mohamed-mutwali-sharawi-1165880.html>

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

be interpreted, the best person to do so would be Prophet Muhammad who received it, conveyed its meanings, and taught it to the people. My work and role is to give my thoughts about these texts and meanings, to clarify the reason behind the ruling and judgments, discover the beauty of the passages, and uncover their secrets about the universe'. Therefore, he maintains that the Qur'an is alive and that its passages are full of light and miracles.

We discover everyday new secrets in the Qur'an, which touch on many matters related to the universe and its laws. The Qur'an does not contradict the constant cosmic realities, and anything that is in contradiction with the Qur'an is not considered a fact – researchers in cosmology can prove it to be false. He added that the hope he has, is that Muslims love their religion first and prioritise it above all else.⁵⁹¹ He was moderate in interpreting the passages in scientific terms and claiming them to be scientific facts. He followed this in a moderate way, and he often referred to God's boundless ability and greatness through scientific discoveries and passages explaining cosmology.⁵⁹²

Sha'rāwī's thought comprises three aspects: the religious, the political, and the social. He views that some opponents of Islam perpetrated misconceptions and claims against it with the intention of defaming its principles and teachings, and others defame it out of ignorance and misunderstanding its language, which is a vital tool that plays an indispensable role in Qur'anic exegesis.⁵⁹³ He also maintains that orientalist and opponents of Islam fabricate non-traditional issues related to Islam and use them to attack its teachings, all in an attempt to portray it as a religion which is not compatible with modern life. Therefore, he asserted that this kind of criticism of Islam requires Muslim scholars to respond with objective scholarly vision while adopting a modern methodology and avoiding fanaticism, emotion, and blind support.⁵⁹⁴

According to Al-Tijānī, Sha'rāwī's exegesis contains lots of deductions, conciliations, responses to the common statements of the previous exegetes, and it is a combination

⁵⁹¹ See '*Manhaj Al-Sheikh Al-Sha'rāwī in Tafsīrihi wa Muqaranatuhu bi Manahij al-Mufasssīrīn Al-Mu'asssīrīn*' by Muhammad Al-Tijānī (Cairo: Ain Shams University: 2004), p. 26

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Yunis, Abdel-Dayem, *Muhammad Mutwallī Al-Sha'rāwī Shā'iran wa Nāqidan*, (Egypt: Faculty of Arabic Language, Al-Azhar University 2012) vol.1, pp. 39-81

⁵⁹⁴ Zayed, Muhammad, *Mudhakirat Imām Ad-Du'ah*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Shurūq, 1998), pp. 16-17

between the methodology of both classical and contemporary exegeses.⁵⁹⁵ The researcher also conducted a comparative study between Sha'rāwī's methodology and the methods of contemporary Arab exegetes in Egypt, Sudan, Hijaz, Syria, and North Africa. He concluded that Sha'rāwī's exegesis is more comprehensive than Ṭanṭāwī Jawahrī's, and greater in terms of accuracy in scientific understanding, comprehension, criticism, and linkage between the facts of science and Qur'anic miracles.⁵⁹⁶

Evidently then, it is a critical contribution to contemporary exegesis, which left a positive impact on public minds and influenced many people in the Arab world. Dr Mahmud H. Zaqqūq⁵⁹⁷ stated that the unique style and attractive way of presenting exegesis has drawn the attention of the literate and illiterate, educated and lay.⁵⁹⁸ Dr Ahmad Omar Hashem⁵⁹⁹ holds that Sha'rāwī's exegesis was distinguished by his deep knowledge of science, occasion of revelation, *ḥadīth* science, knowledge of the Arabic language, and knowledge of literature. He was well-known for his unique analytical style of exegesis and the ability to attract his viewers via modern media outlets.⁶⁰⁰ Hashem considered him to be one of the *mujaddidīn* (revivers) of this century, combining tradition and modernity amidst the political events of his time.⁶⁰¹

6.4. Sha'rāwī's Methodology

The methodology of Sha'rāwī in his exegesis was to reform and cure issues of isolation between the scholars and people, and separation between the Qur'an and social, political and cultural life. He has tried to cure these issues by linking exegesis with the social, political, and moral realities, removing this isolation between modernity and Qur'anic guidance. Sha'rāwī calls for 'realistic exegesis', which is exegesis that addresses contemporary issues and encourages reform. This methodology is similar to 'Abdu's, who founded the rules of reform and religiously oriented modernity, but 'Abdu was not given the opportunity to complete his ideas and achieve his wishes.

⁵⁹⁵ See 'Manhaj Al-Sheikh Al-Sha'rāwī in Tafsīrihi wa Muqaranatuhu bi Manahij al-Mufasssīrīn Al-Mu'āssirīn' by Muhammad Al-Tijānī (Cairo: Ain Shams University: 2004)

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Minister of Awqaf in Egypt (1996-2010)

⁵⁹⁸ Zayed, Muhammad, *Mudhakirat Imām Ad-Du'ah*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Shurūq, 1998), pp. 11-12

⁵⁹⁹ Dr Hashem was the head of Al-Azhar University and professor of Hadith science

⁶⁰⁰ Zayed, Muhammad, *Mudhakirat Imām Al-Du'ah*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Shurūq, 1998), p. 16

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., p.19

Since Sha'rāwī's first lecture, he continued unveiling his theory that he adopted in his exegesis of the Qur'an. He declared that his exegesis is nothing but reflections and thoughts, and that it does not represent an exegesis in the technical sense of the word. From this perspective, it can be said that he was never aiming to interpret the Qur'an, rather, he wanted to stress its everlasting relevance by extrapolating its timeless guidance in the form of intelligent and sincere reflections.⁶⁰²

Sha'rāwī did not complete his *Khawāṭir* for the entire Qur'an. He reached *Sūrah Al-Mumtahinah*. Later, the last *Juz'* of the Qur'an was found recorded in Saudi Arabia. His *Khawāṭir* can be defined as comprehensive thoughts, not a technical analysis. It is distinguished by many subtle linguistic highlights, and the reflections on occasions and events that highlight links between the passages. However, Sha'rāwī in his *Khawāṭir* does not allude to any link between the *Sūrahs*, nor does he focus on the thematic unity in the passages and chapters as the other contemporary exegeses did. He did not quote often from other classical or contemporary exegeses like Ibn 'Āshūr, nor did he express much interest in their differences and views. If there is a difference, he usually respects others' views but would choose his own, because according to him, these differences arise because every exegete sees issues from his own perspective, even though they all aim to serve the religion.⁶⁰³

The sources that Sha'rāwī referred to in his *Khawāṭir* were '*Al-Kashshāf*' by Al-Zamakhsharī, '*Fi Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*' by Sayyid Quṭb, and '*Kalimāt Al-Qur'ān*' by Hasanain Makhluḥ. Usually, Sha'rāwī would propose hypothetical questions and suggest a response. For instance, he would often say, 'A questioner may ask' or 'Someone may ask', then he would answer the question himself. His methodology, from this aspect, is similar to that of Al-Rāzī, who used to assume *masā'il* and questions on the pressing issues of his time, then provide his answers. Sha'rāwī was keen to show the wisdom of God in everything, including in His Legislation, and he repeatedly drew attention to the fact that there is wisdom in everything that God decrees, which we may not understand or may overlook. Sha'rāwī's methodology was to introduce the *Sūrah*,

⁶⁰² Yūnis, Abdel-Dayem, *Muhammad Mutwallī Al-Sha'rāwī Shā'iran wa Nāqidan*, (Egypt: Faculty of Arabic Language, Al-Azhar University 2012) vol.1, pp. 39-81

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

discuss the occasion of its revelation, highlight the subject which links the passages, and then reap lessons learned from its meanings.⁶⁰⁴

His exegesis was distinguished with linguistic analyses and explanations of classical words in simple terms, helping the listener to understand the meanings of the Qur'an. Sha'rāwī was moderate in interpreting passages in scientific terms and using scientific interpretations. He followed this in a modest way, and he often referred to God's ability and greatness through scientific discoveries and passages discussing cosmological wonders. He maintained that the method of deriving the truth was on the basis of the Qur'an, which was the basis for his logical arguments and proofs.⁶⁰⁵

Thus, Sha'rāwī's methodology relied on analysing the passages related to the Jews and the Christians using logic and rational argumentation to decipher the three types of discourse without ignoring the texts and traditions. He also analysed the language in the Qur'an and its syntax to suggest other possible interpretations of the text. He sometimes interpreted passages using others (interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself) in order to prove his arguments and refute the misconceptions surrounding the polemical passages.

6.5. Criticism of Sha'rāwī

Like many other scholars, Sha'rāwī was criticised for his views on some Islamic and political issues, especially the positions he adopted in the Egyptian socio-political climate during his time.⁶⁰⁶ Naturally, he was also criticised for the methodology adopted in his exegesis – this will be discussed later. In 1940, when he heavily praised King Farouk in a poem linking him to the Prophet Muhammad, he was heavily criticized for over-praising him. He also wrote a religious poem glorifying President Nasser. Sha'rāwī also defended President Sadat in parliament in 1978, quoting a Qur'anic passage and using it to refer to Sadat, '*... You are accountable to him but he is accountable to no one*' (21: 23). He was also censured for his attack on intellectuals and thinkers, such as Tawfiq Al-Hakim and Naguib Mahfūz, because they criticised some of his *Fatāwā*. In fact, his religious verdicts on substantial issues were criticised

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Brinton, G. Jacqueline 'Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt' (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), p. 107

⁶⁰⁶ Ḥamdan, Majid, *Mawqif Al-Sheikh Al-Sha'rāwī min Qaḍaya Al-Aqīda*, (MA Thesis, 2002)

by many thinkers and governmental bodies. For example, he supported female circumcision and maintained that women should not be appointed as judges or in top government positions. He further advocated banning organ transplantation and donation after death, and he considered it a blasphemy. Sha'rāwī's *Fatāwā* were considered by his critiques as contradictory or having double standards. He was against paying interest on bank deposits, yet he was the religious adviser to one of Egypt's top Islamic banking finance institutions.⁶⁰⁷

He was criticised when he declared that the state is not wrong if it adopted a secular political system and considers that to be one of the rights of the state.⁶⁰⁸ Critics hold that this goes against the Qur'anic teachings which warn against adopting non-Islamic systems of governance; they quote the Qur'anic passages (Q 5: 44, 45, 47). Sha'rāwī was also against the *Adhān* (call for prayer) at Fajr (before dawn) being given via microphone,⁶⁰⁹ and he also declared that, if the decision had been his, he would give freedom to the apostate and would not apply the Islamic penalty.⁶¹⁰ The critics also claim that these views do not agree with the Islamic teachings which refer to implementing the legal punishment on the apostate; his view goes against the majority view of Muslim scholars on this issue.

Sha'rāwī's view on Sadat's assassination also put him under the criticism of the conservatives when he declared that the motivation behind it was not religious but political. According to him, those who planned his assassination were not supporters of Islam, but they were enemies of the regime – he held that their aim was to attain power, which was the goal of many people in the Muslim world.⁶¹¹ Critics view that Sha'rāwī rejected the motivations of the assassins and refused to accept that they assassinated Sadat because the law of the country contradicted the Islamic Sharī'ah and the country followed the Camp David Agreement with Israel and continued to arrest and imprison Muslim scholars and humiliate them.⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-sheikh-mohamed-mutwali-sharawi-1165880.html>

⁶⁰⁸ Al-Minshāwī, Muhammad, *Al-Sheikh Al-Sha'rāwī wa Ḥadīth Adh-Dhikrayāt*, (Cairo: Dra Al-Fadilah, no date) pp. 25-26

⁶⁰⁹ See *Majlat Al-Da'wah*, Issue No. 20, 1978

⁶¹⁰ See Muhammad Mitwallī Al-Sha'rāwī, *Qaḍāya Islamiya*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Shurūq 1979) p. 27.

⁶¹¹ See Hassan, Muhammad Mahjoub, *Sha'rāwī Min al-Qaryah ila al-Ālamiya*, (Cairo: Maktabat Al-Turath al-Islāmī, 1998, p. 21

⁶¹² Heikal, Muhammad Hassanin, *Kharīf al-Ghadab Bidāyat wa Nehāyat 'Asr Anwar Al-Sadāt*, (Cairo: Markaz Al-Ahram li An-Nashr wa Al-Tarjamah, 1988), p. 124

Sha'rāwī was criticised for his methodology of exegesis, even from those who supported his views. They viewed his exegesis as being full of digression, stretching, and prolongation. They also criticised him for the combining of more than one methodology, which is not compatible with the language of modern times. He spoke on all issues, questions, and sciences that were not in his fields of specialisation. Sha'rāwī is also criticised because he was not the one who wrote his own exegesis; he had his supporters and followers write it like other exegeses in order to remove the digressing tales, the Egyptian dialect, and the colloquial language.

6.6. People of the Book in Sha'rāwī's Exegesis

Sha'rāwī defines *Ahl Al-Kitāb* as those communities of the Jews who followed Moses; and the communities of the Christians who followed Jesus. He acknowledges there were communities from the Jews and Christians on the Arab Peninsula at the time of Muhammad. He divided the Jews into two communities: the learned and unlearned (Q 2:79, 3:75).⁶¹³ It is also evident from his commentary that the true Jews are those who follow the true Torah and did not make changes in it, those are the true Jewish believers; while those who made changes in the Torah are sinners (Q:2:121). Similarly, the Christians are also divided into groups: one is the learned such as the educated priests, monks, and religious leaders and the other group is the unlearned. They are also divided into two groups: one true believers of Christians who believed in Jesus and the unaltered Gospel and another who did not alter the Gospel.⁶¹⁴ Sha'rāwī, like exegetes agrees that the People of the Book are closer to Muslims than any other religious faction, as they received a book and a messenger that came from God. The divine message from Adam to Muhammad is the oneness of God and the fact that He created all things. According to Sha'rāwī, any change in this message is an unacceptable deviation and distortion.⁶¹⁵ However, he devoted a significant portion of his work to interpreting a large number of passages that criticised the Jews and Christians for various reasons; and another portion to refute the polemical issues concerning them and their beliefs.

⁶¹³ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), vol. 1, p. 236

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., vol.1, p. 210

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 608

Based on a holistic analysis of the two largest *Sūrahs*, *Al-Baqarah* and *Āl ‘Imrān*, and their depiction of the People of the Book, Sha‘rāwī maintains that the message of Islam came to confirm Judaism and Christianity and not to cancel them or their teachings. Muhammad’s message was not sent to destroy Judaism or Christianity, nor to incite fanaticism. He felt that the Qur’an came to preserve the correct telling of historical events. Therefore, *Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān*, which relates the story of Jesus and his people, came after another long *Sūrah*, *Al-Baqarah*, which relates the story of Moses and the Children of Israel. For this reason, the People of the Book were supposed to believe in the new message which came to confirm their religion.⁶¹⁶

Due to the negative discourse on the People of the Book being much more than the positive one, Sha‘rāwī’s exegesis is full of discussion, stating the reasons for such an attitude and the historical and religious reasons for it. The criticism of the Jews was much more than that of the Christians because of the large number of prophets sent to them; plenty of passages discuss their mistakes and disobedience, especially in the long *Sūrahs* of the Qur’an. The *Sūrahs* which contain the most discourse about the People of the Book are *Al-Baqarah*, *Āl ‘Imrān*, *Al-Nisā’*, *Al-Mā’idah*, *Al-A‘rāf*, *Al-Isrā’*, *Maryam*, *Tā-hā*, *Al-Shu‘arā’*, *Al-Qaṣaṣ*, and *Al-Ṣaff*.

Sha‘rāwī’s exegesis covers a wide range of the polemical discourse regarding the People of the Book in these *Sūrahs*. In his commentary on these *Sūrahs*, Sha‘rāwī employed a strict tone when explaining the passages containing negative discourse regarding the People of the Book, especially those related to the defiant sins of the Children of Israel. He also clarifies why the Qur’an employs this strong tone towards the Jews who disobeyed and broke the covenant of God. The Jewish attitude towards Islam is explained in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* (Q 2: 100-110), which explains the favours God bestowed on the Jews, the denial of these favours, the breaking of the covenant of God, *Tahrīf* (distortion),⁶¹⁷ and disobedience of the Jews to Moses and the Torah. Sha‘rāwī focused his criticism on the issue of breaking the covenant and the denial of Muhammad’s prophecy.⁶¹⁸

However, Sha‘rāwī had an objective attitude in his explanation – not all Jews are negatively treated. Those who obeyed, followed the teachings of Judaism, and kept to

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., p. 808

⁶¹⁷ Concealing what is stated in the Torah about the Prophecy of Muhammad

⁶¹⁸ MS: Al-Sha‘rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur’an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 284

God's covenant are positively treated because they believed in what the Torah taught and were ready to believe in Muhammad and the new religion. Therefore, God wants to open the door to those who want to believe and keep the covenant. However, they are few in number, while the majority broke the covenant as the Qur'an stated in (Q 2: 101).⁶¹⁹ Sha'rāwī in his commentary on (Q 2:201) also asserted that the Qur'an was revealed to confirm the Torah, not to cancel it.

Criticism is, therefore, directed to the Children of Israel who concealed and changed some of the teachings in accordance to their desires. The Qur'an explained what they hid and affirmed what they did not hide and did not manipulate. It would be unfair for the Qur'anic discourse to categorically judge all Jews as being the same. It did not do this; it differentiated between two groups among them: (1) those who broke the covenant and disbelieved, and (2) those who believed and did not renounce the Book.⁶²⁰ Sha'rāwī highlighted the precise language of the Qur'an when it describes the People of the Book using words such as '*minhum*' (from them), '*ba'ḍ*' (some of them), '*aktharahum*' (most of them), or '*qalīl*' (a few), showing that they are not all alike. Sha'rāwī explains the passage (Q 2: 109) as affirming his idea and proving that some rejected Muhammad's prophecy and tried to make people leave Islam while others had the intention to believe in the new message. They tried to make Muslims change their belief not because the teachings of their Book urge them to, but out of envy and pride.⁶²¹

In his commentary, Sha'rāwī has explained the three types of discourse on Jews and Christians and the reasons for each type. Sha'rāwī, like other exegetes, commented on the passages related to the People of the Book in his own methodology and linked the historical context of the passages with the concurrent circumstances. According to him, the reasons for this positive discourse ultimately came back to the good characteristics they possessed. In other words, this praise applies to all who possess these qualities till the Last day; but if these characteristics changed for evil ones, this positive discourse would no longer apply to them.⁶²² Sha'rāwī maintains that if the People of the Book believe in what Muslims believe, then they would be guided. But,

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., p. 285

⁶²⁰ Ibid., p. 286

⁶²¹ Ibid., p. 311

⁶²² MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 311

if the message of Islam reached them fully and they did not believe, then they would be in division and difference with each other (see Q 2: 137).⁶²³

Sha'rāwī explains the reasons for the negative and positive discourse and the characteristics of the Christians in verses (Q 57: 27).⁶²⁴ In a similar fashion to Al-Rāzī, Sha'rāwī poses a question about the monasticism they practised and whether it was praised by God or not. If they were praised by God, he asks, then why did God state in the same passage that monasticism is something they invented and did not practise properly? This Qur'anic section informs of the procession of messengers until Jesus and the Gospel, and how he was blessed with a great deal of compassion and kindness that affected the hearts of those who followed him. They invented monasticism in order to increase their worship of Him, however, God did not request this from them. Therefore, some of them are criticised not because of the monasticism, rather, due to improper practise of it.⁶²⁵

Sha'rāwī agreed with 'Abdu and Riḍā that those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds will be rewarded, but he disagree regarding the destiny of those who believe in their religion's principles. Sha'rāwī considered those who received Muhammad's message clearly and freely and then refused it as being non-believers. They must have the same belief like Muslims in order be true believers and attain salvation (see Q 2: 137). On the other hand, 'Abdu views that the Jews and the Christians who believe in One God and the Last Day, and do good deeds will attain salvation.

6.7. The Torah and the Gospel in Sha'rāwī's Exegesis

Sha'rāwī, like other scholars, defines the Torah as the Book which was revealed to Moses for the Children of Israel. However, he disagrees with other scholars who claim that the origin of the two terms *Tawrāh* and the term *Injīl* came from Arabic, and give meaning and derivatives to the two terms. Sha'rāwī claims that the two names are not of Arabic origin; as the *Tawrāh* is a Hebrew term; and *Injīl* is of a Syriac or Greek origin term; both of them are not Arabic and added into Arabic language because the

⁶²³ Ibid., p. 363

⁶²⁴ '...We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers. But monasticism was something they invented– We did not ordain it for them– only to seek God's pleasure, and even so, they did not observe it properly....' (Q 57:27)

⁶²⁵ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 2312

Qur'an used them.⁶²⁶ He emphasised that although the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, however, it has many words and terms which are not of Arabic origin.

Sha'rāwī, like other exegetes, maintains that the Qur'anic discourse on all Sacred Scriptures has consistent tone, although the Jews and Christians are believed to have made distortion to the Torah and Gospel respectively.⁶²⁷ According to Sha'rāwī, all divine Books, including the Torah and Gospel, contain the general principles of belief, ethics and morality, divine justice, and stories of the prophets. They are fixed in all books and in all the prophets' messages, and only the rulings regarding the way to worship differ from one Book to another to suit the time and place for which the Books were revealed. That is what the Qur'an confirms in passage (Q 42: 13). He also maintains that the Qur'an was revealed, and that it affirmed the Torah and the Gospel, and the Children of Israel knew the authenticity of the Qur'an and the truth of Muhammad's prophethood, but they denied him because he was not from their people.

In his commentary on (Q 2: 3-5) about the characteristics of the believers, Sha'rāwī explained that Islam faced two categories of people: polytheists/pagans (*Kuffār*), who did not believe in God or a messenger, and the People of the Book, who believe in God, His messenger, and His revelation. Islam asked the two categories of people to believe in the new message. The People of the Book might, therefore, think that it is enough for them to believe in God, His Messenger, and His Books, and that there is no need to believe in a new religion. He also emphasised that Islam came for everyone to believe, including the People of the Book. Sha'rāwī does not describe the People of the Book as disbelievers, however, he maintains that they are required to believe in the final message of Islam. Although the descriptions of his prophethood existed in their books, they denied him and his message after they used to tell the pagans of Arabia about his coming and that they would follow him and lead Arabia under his rule (Q 2: 89).⁶²⁸

Sha'rāwī's commentary mainly discussed three things about the Torah and the Gospel: (1) affirming that they are Books from God, (2) the distortion of the Torah and the Gospel, and (3) the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad . In his commentary

⁶²⁶ Ibid., vol.1, 970

⁶²⁷ Ibid., p. 6675

⁶²⁸ Ibid., p. 65

on (Q 2: 89),⁶²⁹ he affirmed the understanding that the Qur'an was revealed and that it affirmed the Torah and the Gospel, although distortions were made therein, especially in relation to Muhammad's prophethood. He asserted that this is the meaning of the term '*Ahd*' (i.e. covenant) in passage (Q 2: 89), which explains that it is necessary for all peoples and nations to believe in Muhammad's message if it reaches them and they know about it.⁶³⁰

Referring to (Q 7: 156-157), Sha'rāwī mentions that the mercy of God will reach the people with the characteristics mentioned in this passage, which, he maintains, is a proof of the prophethood of Muhammad's message, as written in their Books. They believed that prophethood is only inherited by the Children of Israel, so they rejected Muhammad for being an Arab. If they do not believe in this religion, there will be no covenant between them and God.⁶³¹ In his commentary on (Q 2: 41), Sha'rāwī highlighted the Qur'an's affirmation of the original Torah and Gospel, which were the words of God. Because of the information in the Torah and the Gospel about Muhammad's prophethood, God warned them in the end of the passage against disbelief in him.⁶³² But they did not obey and they denied the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad. They did so out of the arrogance and envy they felt for losing leadership and prophethood from Isrealite to Arab blood.⁶³³ The narration of 'Abdullāh ibn Salām and Ibn Yāmīn, who were among the People of the Book, showed that they both saw the mention of Muhammad in the Torah and in the Gospel. In this regard, he refers to the Qur'anic verse, '*They know him as they know their children*' (Q 2: 146).

In his commentary on (Q 17: 107), Sha'rāwī explains that this passage refers to the Jews and the Christians who followed their heavenly Books and conveyed their teachings as they were, without distortion, to other communities and testified that the Prophet Muhammad is a true messenger of God. An example from those groups of

⁶²⁹ *When a Scripture came to them from God confirming what they already had, and when they had been praying for victory against the disbelievers, even when there came to them something they knew (to be true), they disbelieved in it: God rejects those who disbelieve..'* (Q 2:89)

⁶³⁰ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980) p. 157

⁶³¹ Ibid., p. 157

⁶³² Ibid., vol. 1, p. 294-95

⁶³³ Ibid., pp. 6675-76

the People of the Book is ‘Abdullah Ibn Salam, a Jewish scholar who knew the descriptions of Muhammad and the time of his mission.’⁶³⁴

It is clear in Sha‘rāwī’s commentary that the portrayal of the two sacred scriptures i.e. the Torah and the Gospel is consistently positive and describe them as Books of guidance and light to those who follow them. He also demonstrates that one of the reasons for positive discourse about the good groups the Jews and Christians returns to their following these Books. He considers the true believers of the Jews and Christians are those who follow the guidance of these scriptures; and they will be winners. On the other hand, one of the reasons for the negative discourse about the Jews and Christians returns to disobedience to the teachings of these Books and distorting them.

6.8. Moses and Jesus in Sha‘rāwī’s Exegesis

Sha‘rāwī views all messengers and prophets – including Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad – as being sent to affirm certain principles: primarily, belief in the oneness of God and worship of Him alone, as well as basic ethical values. What they differed on were legal matters and the details of how to worship God, which are secondary and subsidiary principles. As evidence for this, Sha‘rāwī refers to the passage in *Sūrah Al-Shūrā* (Q 42: 3).⁶³⁵ Due to the scatteredness of peoples in every region around the world, and each group of them being isolated from the other, and because of the distance and lack of means of communication between them, problems arise among them. Prophets and messengers were sent by God to cure these problems.

Sha‘rāwī demonstrates the difference between Muhammad’s message and the message of other prophets – including Moses and Jesus – and clarifies that previous prophets came to cure the particular problems most common in their community and people. One prophet, for example, came to cure the issue of cheating in weight and balance; another came to cure the issue of tyranny in wealth or money; and another came to cure the issue of sodomy and homosexuality. On the other hand, the message of Muhammad is comprehensive and is for all communities. It came with a cure for all

⁶³⁴ MS: Al-Sha‘rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur‘an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), vol. 14, p. 8804

⁶³⁵ ‘In matters of faith, He has laid down for you (people) the same commandment that He gave Noah, which We have revealed to you (Muhammad) and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus: ‘Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it’...’ (Q 42:13)

the issues of previous nations and combined their principles into one message.⁶³⁶ The root principles of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are the same, but they differ in the branches or details. Therefore, God says, '*For every nation, we made a way...*' (Q 22: 67), which means that God made for every group a law which is suitable for their time and environment. The morality and beliefs in all these 'religions' are the same. For example, God is one in all religions, and cheating and lying is forbidden in all religions. However, according to Sha'rāwī, God knew that this geo-social isolation would end, and that these groups and peoples would meet on one thing and would unite to challenge these problems, so He sent the last prophet to them.⁶³⁷ Consequently, because all prophets came with common major principles and common morals, whoever disbelieved in one prophet disbelieved in all other prophets. For this reason, Muslims are commanded to believe in all previous revelations and prophets (see Q 2: 285, 3: 84). Sha'rāwī believed that the different ways and rules of one prophet to another were set to be changeable and developed according to needs, places, and times. He maintains that these are subsidiary issues and they are not related to the main principles of belief and morals.⁶³⁸

Sha'rāwī criticised the People of the Book for their denial of the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), something which had been foretold by Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them both. Referring to the passage (Q 2: 36) in which Muslims are commanded to believe in all messengers and Books, he emphasised that Islam came with similar principles and values to complete the procession of messages. This is confirmed in another passage (Q 5: 3), and in a statement of the Prophet Muhammad, 'My similitude in comparison with the other prophets before me, is that of a man who has built a house nicely and beautifully, except for the place of one brick in a corner. The people go about it and wonder at its beauty, but say: 'Would that this brick be put in its place!' I am that brick, and I am the last of the Prophets.'⁶³⁹ Sha'rāwī's commentary, like other commentaries, demonstrates that the Qur'anic discourse on Moses and Jesus is also not fluctuating and consistently positive; for they are described as messengers of God to people who would be guided by them to the

⁶³⁶ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 6095

⁶³⁷ Ibid., pp. 6094-95

⁶³⁸ Ibid., p. 6592

⁶³⁹ Ibid., p. 1063

straight path. Those messengers who were selected by God would also convey the message of God through the Torah and Gospel.

6.9. Examples of the Qur'anic Discourse in Sha'rāwī's Exegesis

Sha'rāwī maintains that *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* devotes a significant portion of its discourse to the Children of Israel, Jews, Moses, and the Torah, while *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān* gives a thorough narration of the story of the family of 'Imrān, including Jesus, Mary, and the Children of Israel. The same occurs also in *Sūrahs Al-Nisā'*, *Al-Mā'idah*, and *Al-A'rāf*. Three examples of positive, negative, and polemical discourse will demonstrate more how Sha'rāwī understand the Qur'anic discourse on the People of the Book and how the passages related to them are contextualised and interpreted by him.

6.9.1. Examples of Positive Discourse

This positive discourse about the Jews and Christians is considered an expression of God's appreciativeness for their loyalty, and an honour for their Rabbis and priests who taught their people about God, imparting the knowledge He granted them. According to Sha'rāwī, discretion is advised when considering the different types of monks and priests, both those who teach this knowledge, even if they did not apply it, and those who carry forth this knowledge and practise it. Consequently, this makes them closer in affection to Muslims.⁶⁴⁰ Similarly, Sha'rāwī analysed the positive discourse in passages (Q 3: 113-114) and linked it with the negative discourse in the previous passages (Q 3:110, 111, 112), clarifying how the Qur'anic discourse treats the People of the Book. He discussed the numerous favours which God bestowed on *Banī Isrā'īl*, as mentioned in many *Sūrahs* (*Al-Baqarah*, *Al-Nisā'*, *Al-Mā'idah*, and *Al-A'rāf*). However, they disobeyed and committed wrongdoings – lying to their prophets and even killing them. For this, they earned the wrath of God and His punishment.

Sha'rāwī differentiated between God's initial treatment and their eventual punishment due to their action. For clarity, he produced another example from *Sūrah Al-Nisā'* (see Q 4: 60), in order to show that God's punishment came as a result of their disobedience. The discourse in these passages aims at revealing the truth and judging by it, and this is evident in the passage, for it does not regard all of the People of the

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 2310-2311

Book as equal. They are not alike, some of them are good and believe in God and His Books, while others are not. Therefore, God, who is the Just, differentiates between those who disobeyed and disbelieved and those who believed and performed good deeds. Sha'rāwī feels that God makes this clear in the following passages (Q 3: 113-114).⁶⁴¹

Passages (Q 28: 51-55)⁶⁴² are an example of positive discourse. Sha'rāwī maintains that this passage confirmed that the Jews and Christians would be given two rewards for their belief: one reward for affirming faith in Jesus or Moses, and a second for affirming faith in Muhammad. He agrees that the People of the Book will be given a reward if they believed in their religion, and refers to a similar statement of the Prophet Muhammad in which he stated, 'One of the three persons who will get a double reward is he who belonged to the People of the Book, had full faith in his Prophet and then affirmed faith in Muhammad'.⁶⁴³ He adds that they will get a double reward because they avoided seeking temporal power and avoided nationalistic, racial, and tribal prejudices while remaining steadfast on the way of true faith. They also suffered a lot and were patient towards the harm of people because of their belief in their prophet. When, on the advent of the new prophet, they were confronted by intense trial, they proved by their conduct that they were not Christ worshippers but God worshippers. They answer evil and falsehood with what is good and right; they repel injustice and mischief with what is just and noble. In his commentary on this statement, '*Those to whom We gave the Scripture before believe in it, and, when it is recited to them, say, 'We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord. Before it came we had already devoted ourselves to Him'*', Sha'rāwī stated that everyone who believed in a Book and Prophet before Islam is called Muslim because they submit to God; thus, they get their reward. Then they would get a second reward for their belief in the Qur'an.⁶⁴⁴ At this point, Sha'rāwī agrees with 'Abdu and Riḍā who believe that those who believe in one God and the last day and perform good deeds are called Muslims.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., p. 1135

⁶⁴² '*We have caused Our Word to come to them so that they may be mindful. Those to whom We gave the Scripture before believe in it, and, when it is recited to them, say, 'We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord. Before it came we had already devoted ourselves to Him.'* They will be given their rewards twice over because they are steadfast, repel evil with good, give to others out of what We have provided for them, and turn away whenever they hear frivolous talk, saying, 'We have our deeds and you have yours. Peace be with you! We do not seek the company of ignorant people.' (Q 28: 51-55)

⁶⁴³ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 6876

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 6875

Another example that demonstrates the positive discourse can be found in passage (Q 2: 62).⁶⁴⁵ In his commentary on this passage, Sha'rāwī opines that God wished to show the status of people of other faiths after he mentioned the Children of Israel's ingratitude to His favours in the previous passages (Q 2: 47-60). Two similar passages are apparent in *Sūrahs Al-Mā'idah* (Q 5: 69)⁶⁴⁶ and *Al-Ḥajj* (Q 22: 17),⁶⁴⁷ with slight differences between the three passages. The Sabians came before the *Naṣārā* in *Al-Mā'idah* and after them in *Al-Baqarah*. In *Sūrah Al-Ḥajj*, two additional groups were mentioned, Magians (Majūs) and idolaters; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Sha'rāwī explained that the three passages appear similar, however, there are many differences, such as addition and omission, categorisation and repetition. For instance, in the first two passages (Q 2: 62 and Q 5: 69), the *khavar* (grammatical predicate) is different from the third one in *Sūrah Al-Ḥajj*. In the third one, the *khavar* is, 'Surely God would judge between them on the Day of Judgment', while in the (Q 2: 62, 5: 69), the *khavar* is '*lahum ajruhum*' (they will be rewarded).⁶⁴⁸

Sha'rāwī put forth a slightly different understanding than other exegetes when interpreting the phrase '*Inna alladhīna āmanū*' (Indeed, those who believe). He saw that this belief is that of the *Fiṭrah* (innate disposition for goodness and purity), which came with Adam at the beginning of the world. After Adam, people lost their way and were in need of divine reminder, but when it came, they disbelieved in it, and as a result, they were destroyed. This is what happened to the people of Noah, to Pharaoh, to the people of Lot, and others. Then, other religions came and had followers until this time, such as Jews, Christians, and Sabians. According to Sha'rāwī, it seems as if God wants to combine all the above religions teachings in Muhammad's message. Then he states that all these religions and their followers since Adam have come to an end. Therefore, everyone should now believe in Muhammad in order to earn God's pleasure, and whoever does not believe will wait for God's Judgment on the Last Day.⁶⁴⁹ Then, in his commentary on '*man āmana*', 'those who believe', he insisted that

⁶⁴⁵ *The (Muslim) believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians – all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good– will have their rewards with their Lord. (Q 2: 62)*

⁶⁴⁶ *'For the (Muslim) believers, the Jews, the Sabians, and the Christians– those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds– there is no fear: they will not grieve. (Q 5: 69)*

⁶⁴⁷ *As for the believers, those who follow the Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. (Q 22: 17)*

⁶⁴⁸ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Ḥawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), vol. 1, p. 370

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid..

all those previous faiths (Jews, Christians, Sabians, idolaters, and pagans) will have no fear nor grief if they believe in Muhammad's message; and they will have a reason to fear and grieve if they disbelieve.⁶⁵⁰

In his commentary on passage (Q 5: 82-85),⁶⁵¹ which Sha'rāwī felt had both positive and negative discourse, Sha'rāwī's methodology differed from Ibn 'Āshūr's. He asserted that the new message of Islam will face Jews and Christians who differ amongst themselves and have different wishes, but that their enmity for Islam unites them.⁶⁵² The Jews displayed more enmity because they took temporal power that made them masters in the region, but the Christians had no sovereignty and no temporal authority and focused on worshipping God. Therefore, the one who has no power (i.e. the Christians) does not become hostile to those who came to take the authority and power (i.e. Muslims) from unjust people who had temporal power (i.e. Jews). For this reason, the Qur'anic discourse states, *'you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians, for there are among them people devoted to learning and ascetics (priests and monks)...'*. Sha'rāwī defined the priest as the one who is dedicated to religious knowledge, and he held that monks are the ones who have devoted themselves to worship and practising this knowledge. The priest was supposed to teach the religious knowledge and the monk practise this knowledge; then get monsticised. According to Sha'rāwī, for this reason (i.e. teaching and practising), these people are closer in affection to the believers (i.e. Muslims). Another reason mentioned in the passage is that they are not arrogant, which indicates that they are not seeking power or leadership. The nature of Christianity gives them a great spiritual energy, so they say: *'Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also'*. Sha'rāwī maintains that the reality agrees with the position of the Qur'an toward such groups of Christianity. To prove this reality, he refers to some stances of the *Naṣārā* and Jews towards the Prophet Muhammad

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., vol.1, p. 371

⁶⁵¹ *'You (Prophet) are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians, for there are among them people devoted to learning and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance, and when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears because they recognize the Truth (in it). They say, 'Our Lord, we believe, so count us amongst the witnesses. Why should we not believe in God and in the Truth that has come down to us, when we long for our Lord to include us in the company of the righteous?'* (Q 5:82-85)

⁶⁵² MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 2309-10

and Muslims, explaining how the Christians, including the leader of Abyssinia, treated Muslims. Historical analyses showed how the Jews treated the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims by breaking their treaties and even planning to murder him.⁶⁵³

Sha'rāwī also refers to the passage of (Q 57: 26-27),⁶⁵⁴ in which he explains that the positive discourse about Christianity and Christians shows the chain of prophets from Noah until Jesus and Gospel. *'We sent Noah and Abraham, and gave prophethood and scripture to their offspring: among them there were some who were rightly guided, but many were lawbreakers...'* (Q 57: 26-27). Sha'rāwī gave an example and reference to another passage to explain that following the way of prophets and holy Books is the correct way, which will lead to heaven and salvation. Sha'rāwī discusses the meaning of this passage and how it is similar to passage (Q 5: 82-83). Passage (Q 3: 110)⁶⁵⁵ explains that Muslims are the best nation that God singled out for people, but Sha'rāwī holds that the three conditions need to be met for that status to apply to them: belief in God, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. Sha'rāwī expands on this, saying that the reason for being the best is not because of social position or family status, but because of following the way of Islam and obedience to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings. If they do not follow that way, then the status of being the best will be lost. Whoever will follow the way and obey will be the person who can be titled or named a true believer in God. Therefore, the passage ends with, *'If the People of the Book had also believed, it would have been better for them.'*⁶⁵⁶

6.9.2. Examples of Negative Discourse

The negative discourse in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah* criticised the Children of Israel for being ungrateful for the favours that God gave them and for their disbelief in Muhammad's message. Sha'rāwī, in his commentary on (Q 2: 40-151), counted their acts of disobedience and the denial of Muhammad's prophecy they portrayed, which is even confirmed in the Torah and Gospel.⁶⁵⁷ God is reminding them of these favours and of

⁶⁵³ Ibid., pp. 2309-10

⁶⁵⁴ *they say to those who hate what God has sent down, 'We will obey you in some matters —God knows their secret schemes. How will they feel when the angels take them in death and beat their faces and their backs...'* (Q 57:26-27)

⁶⁵⁵ *(Believers), you are the best community singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God. If the People of the Book had also believed, it would have been better for them. For although some of them do believe, most of them are lawbreakers.* (Q 3:110)

⁶⁵⁶ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 2315

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 169-170-71

their mistakes so that no one can claim that God is cruel or unjust to them. In this context, therefore, they deserve the punishment of God.

Sūrah Al-Nisā' thoroughly covered subjects concerning the Jews and Christians in passages (Q 4: 153-175). Sha'rāwī comments on the passage (Q 4: 171), discussing the criticism of the People of the Book, which warns them against excesses in religion and urges them to follow the way of moderation. Sha'rāwī views that the excess in religion took place when the Children of Israel disbelieved in Jesus and accused Mary of an illicit relationship, and when Christians glorified Jesus to the level of divinity. This type of excess took place in Muslim history too and to similar extremes. A group of Muslims (dissenters) accused 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib – the Prophet's cousin, fourth caliph, and among the first to accept Islam – of disbelief. Another faction among the Shī'a glorified him exaggerated his praises till they claimed he is a prophet, and others even considered him divine.⁶⁵⁸ For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad said to 'Alī, 'You are like Jesus: Jews hated him and slandered his mother, and the *Naṣārā* loved him to the level of (claiming his) divinity'.

The negative discourse, Sha'rāwī believes, comes back to the excessiveness of the People of the Book. In this context, it is particularly the Christians, because the context deals with the *Naṣārā*.⁶⁵⁹ Their excessiveness manifested in their proclaiming Jesus the son of God and elevated him to the status of divinity. Sha'rāwī expanded on the Qur'anic responses to this claim, relying on other texts which prove the Oneness of God and the impossibility of the trinity.

For instance, the creation of Adam, Angels, and the world is a proof that God is the sole Creator of everything, without partner or associate.⁶⁶⁰ In his commentary on passage (Q 3: 64), Sha'rāwī explained the logic and straightforward call to the People of the Book – to truly uphold monotheism and reject polytheism. He rebuked the idea of taking another creature as an associate of God, for taking another god would disrupt the running of the universe. This meaning is confirmed by another passage (Q 23: 91).⁶⁶¹ Sha'rāwī does not discuss the positive side in this call to the People of the Book, which shows that the differences between them and Islam can be solved

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 1979

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 1980

⁶⁶¹ 'God has never had a child. Nor is there any god beside Him– if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overcome the others...' (Q 23:91)

through belief in one God. Instead, he focuses on the issue of polytheism and idolatry in the Qur'an, the passages which reject it, and the reasons for this rejection. If they refuse this call, Muslims remain submitters to the One God.⁶⁶²

The following passage (Q 3: 65-66) brings about discussion on the status and religion of Abraham in the three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with Sha'rāwī affirming his title as the Father of Prophets. He refuted the claim that Abraham was Jewish or Christian and elaborated that this claim would only be acceptable if there was no distortion in Judaism and Christianity, because all religions have the same principles of belief. Abraham was '*Ḥanīfan Muslima*'. '*Ḥanīf*' refers to steadfastness and uprightness, and '*Muslim*' refers to submission to God. Sha'rāwī comments that all prophets and messengers submit to God, hence, they are called Muslims. Consequently, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were all Muslims because they submitted to the will of God. The followers of each prophet or religion or Book since Adam to Muhammad are also called Muslims if they submit and surrender to the will of God, believe in Him, follow His prophet, and obey His Book.

When Muhammad came, the term 'Islam' became a name for Muslims because they surrendered to the will and way of God.⁶⁶³ This view clearly indicates that Islam is not the name of the faith brought by Prophet Muhammad and the term *Muslim* is not only applicable to his followers, but Islam has been the faith of all the prophets since the very beginning, and their followers were Muslims in every age. Those Muslims became disbelievers only when they refused to acknowledge a true prophet who came afterwards, nullifying their submission to God and, hence, the title. But no interruption occurred in the Islam of those people who believed in the former prophet and also affirmed faith in the prophet who succeeded him. They continued to be Muslims just as they had been Muslims before.⁶⁶⁴

Thus, there is 'islam' with lower case 'i', which is the linguistic word for submission, and 'Islam' with an upper case 'I', which is the terminological word used in comparative religion. The former started with Adam and it allows all those who realise the meaning of the word to be Muslims, while the latter started with Muhammad and can only be applied to his followers. When the People of the Book claimed that Abraham was a

⁶⁶² MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Ḥawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980) p. 1011

⁶⁶³ Ibid., p. 1015

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

Jew or a Christian, they wanted to link their lineage to him because he is the Father of Prophets. However, they forget that belief is not related to lineage or race or nationality, but that affiliation is for those who follow the correct way. Sha'rāwī views that the address in the passage can be for those who called themselves Muslims as well as for those who called themselves Jews or Christians. If it is to Muslims, then God clarifies for them that the issue is not one of name, but actions and practice. If the address is to the People of the Book, then God will reward those who act and work even if they do not adhere to Islam, but the reward in the Last Day returns to Him Who will judge between all.⁶⁶⁵

In his commentary on passage (Q 4: 124),⁶⁶⁶ Sha'rāwī does not explain the meaning of the word '*man*' (whoever), whether it refers to Muslims, non-Muslims or both. However, he states that the meaning of the word '*min*' is 'some', namely, 'some good deeds', but, again, he does not explain who are the people who will be admitted to paradise. Sha'rāwī does not also explain the historical context of the passages (Q 4: 124-126) or their occasion of revelation in order to clarify if this discourse is addressed to believers from among Muslims or believers from the People of the Book. He only referred to the occasion of revelation of passage (Q 4: 124),⁶⁶⁷ mentioning that it was revealed when Companions of the Prophet Muhammad found translating this passage into reality hard and so he told them, 'Follow the middle way, do as much as you can, and be steadfast, and in all that afflicts the believer there is atonement'.⁶⁶⁸

Sha'rāwī's commentary on passages (Q 3: 113 -114) explains that the People of the Book mentioned here are those who converted to Islam and worshipped in the best way. However, he maintained that the People of the Book who did not convert are not alike, and Muslims should not think that they are all the same. Those who disbelieved in God's signs, those who killed prophets, and those who are transgressors are not the same as the good-doers (see Q 3: 112).⁶⁶⁹ Therefore, he holds that the ruling does

⁶⁶⁵ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 1835

⁶⁶⁶ '*...Anyone, male or female, who does good deeds and is a believer, will enter Paradise and will not be wronged by as much as the dip in a date stone. Who could be better in religion than those who direct themselves wholly to God, do good, and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith? God took Abraham as a friend.* (4:124)

⁶⁶⁷ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980) pp. 1835-38

⁶⁶⁸ MS: Al-Naysabūrī, Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, (Riyadh: Dar Tiba, 2007) no. 3312

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., p.1133

not include them all. On the other hand, in his commentary on (Q 3: 199),⁶⁷⁰ he gave a slightly different explanation of the positive discourse about the People of the Book in the passage, saying that the Qur'an is not prejudiced against the People of the Book, but it is just and fair in its reflection of their status. The passage contains the word '*min*', which means 'some of them': '*Some of the People of the Book believe in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them: humbling themselves before God...*' He views that this passage refers to those who believed in their heart that this new message (i.e. Islam) was true.

6.9.3. Examples of Polemical Discourse

The polemical discourse in Sha'rāwī's exegesis is one of the most common discourse because it covers many controversial issues with Jews, Christians, and others, such as the oneness of God, alleged divinity of Jesus, crucifixion, mistakes of the Jews, and breaking of the covenants. Commenting on the People of the Book, he regards claims that God has taken a son (Q 2:116) as one of the most polemical issues with Jews and Christians, which is why it is mentioned nineteen times and refuted by the Qur'an. This repetition indicates that it is a serious and significant issue affecting polytheists, pagans, Jews, and Christians (see 37: 151, 153; 9: 30).⁶⁷¹ *Sūrah Maryam* has treated and covered this issue extensively and explained that the universe itself rejects, even curses, all who claimed such blasphemy; and that only humans dared make such an abhorrent accusation.⁶⁷²

In his commentary on (Q 2: 136), Sha'rāwī maintains the correct message from God since the time of Adam until now is the belief that there is no one worthy of worship except God, and that He is the Creator, the Master, the Controller, and the Provider of everything in this universe. Anything against these principles of creed is a distortion of the previous religions and a slander against God. Therefore, when God instructs humanity to believe in what was revealed before them and what was revealed to them, there is no contradiction. The Qur'anic Arabic employs '*Wāw al-'Aṭf*' (واو العطف), which has the grammatical significance of there necessarily being no contradictions. All

⁶⁷⁰ *Some of the People of the Book believe in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them: humbling themselves before God, they would never sell God's revelation for a small price. These people will have their rewards with their Lord: God is swift in reckoning.*

⁶⁷¹ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, Muhammad Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980) pp. 1835-38.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

messages call for the worship of one God, who has no partner. For this reason, passage (Q 2: 36) ends with '*wa naḥnu laḥū Muslimūn*' (we are all submitters to Him (i.e. Muslims)). According to Sha'rāwī, the word '*Muslimūn*' (Muslims) means those who submit to God's Law; that is to say that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Tribes (*Asbāt*), Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them all) submitted to God's Law and worshipped Him alone, with no partner. There cannot be submission to anyone lower.⁶⁷³

Sha'rāwī also discusses the polemical passages about differences among Jews and Christians on salvation and entering paradise behind this claim (see Q 2: 111). According to him, this claim by People of the Book aims at weakening the Muslims' belief in their hearts. Therefore, each group claims that salvation and paradise is only for them without any proof. Emphasising on the differences between Jews and Christians, Sha'rāwī refers to another passage (Q 2: 113) in which he explains the accusations they had for each other. Jews say Christians have no religion and Christians say Jews have no religion, and they consider each other polytheists.⁶⁷⁴ The Qur'an responds to the falsehood and claims of the People of the Book in the next passage (Q 2: 112)⁶⁷⁵ and confirms that the reward and salvation will be only for those who submit to God and do good deeds. Although the verb '*aslama*' has two meanings, one literal (terminology referring to Muslims) and one technical (a person who submits to the will of God), it seems that he adopted the second meaning, namely, a person who becomes Muslim or believes in Islam. He maintains that, with the advent of Islam, God decreed that only those who become Muslims will enter paradise, and he refers to passage 3: 85. However, he explained why the Qur'an did not say, 'The Jews or the Christians will never enter paradise...' as they had said about each other. He stated that the reason for not saying that is because the Qur'an is eternal (*azalī*), which means that it solves issues from the beginning of creation until the Day of Resurrection. If the Qur'an mentions that only those who believe in Muhammad would enter Paradise, it would have exceeded the limit of fairness, because there are Jews and Christians who believed in their Books and messengers before the advent of Islam. Of course, they will be rewarded. Therefore, the Qur'anic discourse was concise and fair. After the

⁶⁷³ Ibid., p. 363

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 315-319

⁶⁷⁵ *In fact, any who direct themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve...*(Q 2:113)

advent of Islam, anyone who receives its message and does not believe will be considered a non-believer, even if they believe in their own message.⁶⁷⁶

Sha'rāwī, in his commentary on the following passage (Q 2: 113), maintains that the differences amongst the three groups of faith will be judged by God who judges between all on the Day of Judgment.⁶⁷⁷ Sha'rāwī agreed with 'Abdu and Riḍā that those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds will be rewarded, but he disagrees with them on the destiny of those who believe in their religion's principles. Sha'rāwī considered those who received Muhammad's message clearly and freely and then refused as non-believers. They must have the same belief like Muslims in order to be true believers and attain salvation (see Q 2: 137). On the other hand, 'Abdu views that the Jews and the Christians who believe in One God and the Last Day and perform good deeds will attain salvation.

Sha'rāwī maintains that the debate in many passages occurred either between the Prophet Muhammad and the pagans or between him and the People of the Book. The instruction of God to the Prophet Muhammad in these passages is to respond to them by the verb 'say', namely, 'O Muhammad if they debate with you about Islam, say 'I submit my face to God.' The context might refer to the pagans who were debating with the Prophet Muhammad, or to the People of the Book. Sha'rāwī elaborated that the Qur'an mentions the pagans and the People of the Book starting debates with the Prophet Muhammad using words such as '*fa-'in hājjūk*' (if they argue with you), '*jādalūka*' (debate with you), or '*yas'alūnaka*' (they ask you). The Qur'an considers Muhammad starting a debate – '*wa la-'in sa'altahum*' (if you were to ask them) (see Q 42: 9, 43: 87).⁶⁷⁸

Sha'rāwī explained that there is a notable exclusion in passage (Q 29: 46) – the phrase, '*illā alladhina ḡalamū minhū*' (except with those of them who act unjustly). This shows that this phrase refers to the People of the Book who are going beyond the acceptable bounds, claiming that Jesus is the son of God or that he is one of three. This will bring them into polytheism. In this context, Sha'rāwī does not name them the People of the Book, because they disobeyed the Book, consequently, they lose this

⁶⁷⁶ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 317

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.330-337

⁶⁷⁸ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 887

title and become polytheists, like those referred to in passages 5: 17 and 73.⁶⁷⁹ The Qur'an taught Muslims how to respond in a good manner to those who act unjustly, 'Say, *'We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are one (and the same); we are devoted to Him'* (Q 29: 46). Sha'rāwī maintains that this asks of the People of the Book, 'Why do we differ if we believe in the same God and your Book mentions the Prophet Muhammad who, it mentioned, will come after your messenger who came after other messengers? If we acknowledge that, then you should believe in the Prophet Muhammad and his message.'⁶⁸⁰

Discussing passage (Q 4: 157), he elaborates on the issue of Jesus' divinity and crucifixion. Sha'rāwī says that these issues are controversial between Muslims and Christians and have been debated throughout the ages, from the advent of Islam to date. Muslims have their own belief and the Christians and Jews have theirs. Sha'rāwī referred to the occasion of revelation for this as a debate amongst Jews, Christians, and Muslims. He cited the debate to have taken place when the Christians of Najran, who were in dispute with some Jews, met the Prophet Muhammad in Madinah. The three religions were in debate and dispute on this issue.⁶⁸¹

Another example of polemical discourse that demonstrates the treatment of the People of the Book is Sha'rāwī's explanation of the passages (Q 4: 153-173). These passages review some of the claims of the Children of Israel against Jesus and refer to other polemical issues that the Qur'an clarifies and refutes. He also counted their many wrongdoings and their denial of Jesus' miraculous birth, the blasphemy against Maryam, and the alleged crucifixion of Jesus. Sha'rāwī uses logical language to refute the crucifixion and killing of Jesus and to expand on the Qur'anic response to their claims. He maintains that the Children of Israel, despite being aware of the prophecy and the coming of Christ, and his birth without a father, as well as the status of Mary and the reality of Jesus' death, still disbelieve. When God refers to Jesus in that section, He says: '*Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God*'. God always attributed Jesus' lineage to his mother or his prophetic status and He refers to him as 'son of

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 2026

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 7027

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., pp.1006-7-8

Maryam' or 'Messenger of God'. In doing so, God directs their attention to the major mistake they committed when they raised him to the status of divinity.

It seems that God mocks their claims, especially in this context of denying His favours, because God will not allow His messengers to be humiliated through crucifixion, and he will not allow them to die before they fulfil their mission. The phrase 'Messenger of God' functions here as a mental trigger to remind them of the falseness of their claim. Afterwards, the phrase, 'They never killed him or crucified him' is mentioned to highlight that the mere thought that they killed Christ made them propagate this lie and declare it to the people, and they did so before they arrived at the idea of crucifixion. They killed someone who looked like Jesus. God denied their claim, '*They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them*' (Q 4: 157).⁶⁸²

Sha'rāwī discussed two issues: the birth and alleged death of the Prophet Jesus . Reason must be consistent in dealing with the two issues. The human mind should see birth and death in the same manner, because they are both extraordinary phenomena. Humans should believe completely what God informs them and should have explanatory unity for all such issues.⁶⁸³ Just as Christians believe that Jesus son of Mary was not born to a father, they should believe that Jesus was raised by God to Him and not crucified. Both the birth and worldly departure of Jesus were miraculous. Sha'rāwī argued that the first miracle (i.e. birth) is to start new life with a miracle, why not then come out of it through a miracle too?⁶⁸⁴

It is noted that Sha'rāwī had different interpretations in the two positive discourses when he maintained that the People of the Book in (Q 3: 113) are those converted to Islam, while in passage (Q 3: 199), he held that People of the Book refers to those who believe that the new message is true and are thinking of becoming Muslim.⁶⁸⁵ Sha'rāwī elaborated on the status of the People of the Book and their prophets and books in the Qur'anic discourse, and he mentioned that it was generally positive for those who believed and obeyed, but negative for those who disbelieved and

⁶⁸² Ibid., pp. 2793-99

⁶⁸³ Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 2793-99

⁶⁸⁴ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), vol. 5, p. 2794

⁶⁸⁵ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 1347

disobeyed. However, he does not explain clearly the destiny of the People of the Book who have not received the message of Islam.⁶⁸⁶

It is also notable that Sha'rāwī employed polemical language in interpreting the passages relating to the Jews and Christians. He refutes their claims mentioned in the Qur'an whether toward their prophets or their Books or toward God. However, the contemporary exegetes varied in his portrayal of the position and destiny of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Qur'anic discourse. For instance, sometimes they place a group from the People of the Book on the same level as the pagans and polytheists of Makkah who worshipped idols or believed in the trinity of God. In other commentary he places them on a similar level as believers. Generally, he presented a fluctuating portrayal of the People of the Book and viewed that those who practise their religion and follow the guidance of the Torah and the Gospel would surely be rewarded and successful. In other passages, he emphasised that these same people would be losers on the Day of Judgement if they receive the message of Muhammad and then reject him. Sha'rāwī viewed that those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds will be but considered those who received Muhammad's message clearly and freely and then rejected it as non-believers. They must have the same belief as Muslims in order be true believers and attain salvation (see Q 2: 137).

Sha'rāwī demonstrates three types of discourses towards the Jews and Christians in his commentary; and emphasised that they are not all alike. Some groups of them are portrayed positively for legitimate reasons such as they are sincere, just, moderate and exercise tolerance towards Islam and Muslims. According to Sha'rāwī, this group are depicted as the minority. Therefore, The Qur'anic discourse is precise when judging nations and people, it does not put them all in the same category. That is why it employs words such as 'some', 'most', and 'few' when referring to them. It is notable that this group does not refer to *Ahl Al-Kitāb* at Muhammad era, but includes every Jewish or Christian who have these characteristics any time and any place. He also views that such group would also believe in Islam if it reached them and they fully recognised its meanings.

Other group in his commentary are portrayed negatively because of their bad attitude and disobedience. He presented polemical explanations to the passages which

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., p.1016

criticises Jews and Christians and the the legitimate reasons mentioned in these passages. He demonstrates how the Qur'an uses metaphors to describe the condition of some Jews who disobeyed God's commandments and followed their desires, transgressing their limits.

7. CHAPTER SEVEN

Polemical Discourse on the People of the Book

Introduction

The third identifiable form of Qur'anic discourse in relation to the People of the Book is that of polemics, which features frequently throughout the Qur'an.⁶⁸⁷ This chapter will discuss the polemical aspects at greater length in order to explicate all three types of discourses, namely, positive, negative and polemical. This will make the portrayal of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Qur'anic discourse more evident. Moreover, this analysis aims at ending the two parts with this third type of discourse by framing polemical discourse within the three exegeses selected for this study.

The Qur'anic polemics are mainly aimed at pagans, disbelievers, Jews and Christians. However, it also takes different forms in different contexts, such as debate with Muslims who commit sins, God's rebuking of Satan, Satan regarding himself better than humans (see Q 15: 30-33); the debate between the companions of the two gardens in *Sūrah al-Kahf* 18,⁶⁸⁸ and the debate between some of the prophets e.g. Abraham, Noah, Hūd, Moses, and Ṣāliḥ, with their people (see Q 29: 46, 9: 32, 2: 258, 7: 25). This passage (Q 40: 5) states that every nation argued with their prophet who was sent to give them the message of God's oneness, the Day of Judgement, and other faith related matters (Q 11: 84-95). Prophet Muhammad practised *Jidāl* (polemics) with the pagans of Makkah, as well as the Christians and Jews.⁶⁸⁹ Polemics are common in the Qur'an, and, during the Makkan period, are directed against the pagans in particular. During the Madinan period of Qur'anic revelation, polemics are addressed to the Jews and Christians. The aim appears to reinforce an Islamic identity that is distinct from Judaism and Christianity.

In the early centuries of Islam, several Muslim scholars authored books about polemics, its science and etiquettes with *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, people of other faiths, and even

⁶⁸⁷ Sharon, M. 'People of the Book.' *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 23 September 2014 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/people-of-the-book-SIM_00319

⁶⁸⁸ McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. "Debate and Disputation." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 27 February 2015 http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/debate-and-disputation-EQSIM_00107

⁶⁸⁹ La'sakir, Yūsuf Umar, *Al-Jadal fi al-Qur'an, Khaṣā'isuh wa Dilalatu*, (Algeria: Algeria University, 2005) p. 68

amongst Muslim sects. An example of these books are: *Al-Radd ‘Alā Al-Naṣārā* (Response to the Christians), by ‘Amr Ibn Baḥr (d. 255 AH), *Al-Dīn wa Al-Dawlah* (Religion and the State) by Abī ‘Alī Ibn Zayn Al-Ṭabarī (d. 305 AH), *Badhl Al-Majhūd fī Ifḥām Al-Yahūd* (Exerting Effort in Refuting the Jews) by Samu‘al Ibn Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 570 AH), *Al-Faṣl fī Al-Milal wa Al-Niḥal* (The Arbitration in Religions and Sects) by Ibn Ḥazm Al-Andalusī (d. 456 AH), *Shifā’ al-Ghalīl* (Quenching the Thirst) by Al-Juwainī (d. 465 AH), *al-Radd al-Jamīl li Ilāhiyyat ‘Isā biṣarīḥ al-Injīl* (An Intelligent Response from the Gospel on the Divinity of Jesus) by Imam al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH), *Hidāyat Al-Ḥayārā fī Ajwibat Al-Yahūd wa Al-Naṣārā* (Guidance for the Lost in Replying to the Jews and Christians) by Ibn Al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH), *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man Baddal Dīn Al-Masīḥ* (The Correct Reply to the One Who Altered the Religion of the Messiah) by Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH), and *Al-Ajwibah Al-Fākhīrah ‘an Al-As’īlah Al-Fājīrah* (Great Answers to Malicious Questions) by Imam Al-Qarāfī (d. 684 AH). In modern times, many works were also written on *Jadal*, such as, *Tārīkh Al-Jadal* by Muhammad Abu Zahra (d. 1974), *Manāḥij Al-Jadal fī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* by Zahir ‘Awwād al-Almaṭī, and *Al-Ḥiwār wa Al-Munāẓarāt fī al-Qur’ān Al-Karīm* by Khalil Abdil Majid.

Contemporary Western scholars have shown little interest in the subject of polemics, debate, and polemical texts in the Qur’an. Numerous scholars such as Cragg, Welch, Marchal, and Fazlur Rahman, have perhaps shown the most, while Waardenburg, Jomier, and Urvoy wrote a chapter on the subject of persuasion and argumentation.⁶⁹⁰ In 2004, Rosalind W. Gwynne published his book, *‘Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an: God’s Argument’*, which is regarded as an important study on the subject of polemics in the Qur’an. The author analysed the subject of argumentation with focus on the types that are employed in the Qur’an. In 1998, Theodore Pulcini published his book, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christians Scriptures*; and in 1999, Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*. While there are a few studies on the Qur’an’s polemical texts, much has been written about Muslim polemical literature, some aspect of which can be seen in the following studies: David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abu Isa al-Warraq’s “Against the Trinity”*; Gabriel S.

⁶⁹⁰ Rippin, Andrew, *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, (UK: article by Kate Zebiri) p. 268

Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in a Sectarian Milieu: Abd al-Jabbar and the Critique of Christian Origins*. For polemical writings on the Qur'an in Western scholarship, there are Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560*; Burman, "Polemic, Philology, and Ambivalence: Reading the Qur'an in Latin Christendom". On more general study, Andrew Rippin, "Western Scholarship and the Qur'an," in Jane McAuliffe (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*.

This chapter on the third type of Qur'anic discourse will facilitate reflection on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Qur'an and aid to understand their portrayal and the interpretation of relevant passages through contextualisation into the historical context. An analysis of these passages is provided in both exegeses: classical and contemporary. A close examination of these verses will offer an explicit understanding the polemical discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Qur'an, assisting in answering the research question.

7.1. Definitions and Qur'anic Terms for Polemics

The Qur'an employs many terms which are synonymous with debate, such as: *hiwār*, *jidāl*, *hājja*, *nizā'*, and *khāṣama* which are equivalent to: dialogue, polemic, discussion, argumentation, and disputation. The closest word to polemic in Arabic is *Jadal*. It is used by Arab writers to refer to negative and positive polemics. *Jadal* can be linguistically defined as the art of argumentation.⁶⁹¹ Technically, it is a sort of formal contest in which two opposing sides respectively defend and attack a given proposition. Some writers, such as 'Abdar-Raḥmān Badawī in his book *Kharīf al-Fikr* (Autumn of Thought), employed the term *Jadal* with the intended meaning of dialogue; while others, such as Bolis Salama (d. 1979 CE) used the same term to mean clash. The majority of writers on this subject used the term *Jadal* to refer to debate and argumentation, such as Abu Zahra (d. 1974 CE) in his book *Tārīkh Al-Jadal* (History of Debate), *Al-Mu'jizah Al-Kubrā* (The Great Miracle), Zahir 'Awwad's (b. 1345 AH) *Manāhij Al-Jadal fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Methodologies of Debate in the Qur'an); and Muhammad Al-Tumī in his book *Al-Jadal fī al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm* (Debate in the Qur'an).⁶⁹²

The Qur'an uses similar words, such as, *ikhtaṣamā* (seek judgment) and *nāza'a* (dispute) which contain the meanings of clashing and argumentative dialogue and

⁶⁹¹ Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad Ibn Mukarram, *Lisān al-'Arab*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' At-Turāth), 1999. 18 vols.

⁶⁹² La'sakir, Yūsuf Umar, *Al-Jadal fil al-Qur'an, Khaṣā'ishuh wa Dilālātu*, Algeria University, 2005) p. 5

recommends such type of dialogue especially with *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, while discouraging it in other situations, especially for Muslims among themselves (see Q 8: 46). These terms are mentioned in the Qur'an in other places which include negative, imperative, and eschatological events (see Q 50: 28, 36: 49, 38: 64, 39: 31, 22: 19, 26: 96-97, and 27: 45). The context and occasion of revelation elaborate the exact meaning of these synonymous terms. The Qur'an also uses several terms to categorise the multiple modes of oppositional discourse. One of them is the word *Jadal*, which is mentioned with its cognates twenty-nine times in the Qur'an. One *Sūrah*'s name is: *Al-Mujādilah* (Dispute 58). The usage for this word takes the form of negative imperatives.⁶⁹³ The descriptive and interrogative uses of the word *Jādala* constitute a larger category. These terms were sometimes used by Prophet Muhammad when he debated with *Ahl Al-Kitāb* and the pagans on issues of belief, and it was also used by his opponents. The word had the propensity to carry many meanings, with the intended one of which in a particular passage being identified through contextual appreciation (see Q 2: 139, 3: 20, 6: 25, and 8: 6, 13: 13, 40: 69, 42: 35).⁶⁹⁴

Ibn 'Āshūr defines *Jidāl*, meaning argument or debate, as the ability to argue with proofs in order to convince the opponent. That is why the rules of debate in *Fiqh* are called '*ilm al-Jadal*, 'the science of argumentation'.⁶⁹⁵ According to him, *Jadal* mentioned in the Qur'an becomes recommended and beneficial when it aims at confirming the truth, such as in (Q 10: 74), but is disliked and harmful when it aims to cause evil, as in (2: 197).⁶⁹⁶ The main issues of *Jadal* with the People of the Book are creedal ones – God's unity and belief in Him, the Day of Resurrection,⁶⁹⁷ disbelief in prophets, and defiant disobedience. Some of these passages contain exhortation to the Jews and Christians (Q 4: 171), while others hold criticism about their deeds and behaviour (Q 3: 19). They also have within them didactic questions (Q 3: 98-99), as well as classifications between good and evil factions within the People of the Book (Q 3: 75, 110; 2: 105).⁶⁹⁸ In addition, there are passages of rebuke (Q 5: 61),

⁶⁹³ See Zebiri, Kate, *Muslims and Christians face to face*, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997)

⁶⁹⁴ McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. "Debate and Disputation." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 27 February 2015 http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/debate-and-disputation-EQSIM_00107

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 194

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., vol. 12, p. 60

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., vol. 17, p. 184

⁶⁹⁸ Kate. "Polemic and Polemical Language." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 08 March 2016 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/polemic-and-polemical-languageEQCOM_00148

disputation (16: 103), challenges (Q 2: 111), refutation of accusations against Prophet Muhammad (Q 53: 2-3), threats and warnings of punishment (Q 9: 61), satire (Q 7: 176), rhetorical or hypothetical questions (Q 84: 20); exclamations (Q 7:10), and emphatic denials and denunciations (Q 104: 3-4).⁶⁹⁹

Commenting on the polemical passage (Q 29: 46), Ibn 'Āshūr defines the word *Jadal* as establishing evidence to support one's view against the opponent's view.⁷⁰⁰ However, in his commentary on (Q 16: 125), Ibn 'Āshūr introduces another definition of *Jadal* or *Mujādalāh* saying, '*Mujādalāh* means argumentation which aims at confirming the soundness of one's viewpoint and the falsification of others' viewpoint with proofs.'⁷⁰¹ He also discusses the time of revelation for this text in Makkah and the reason it was revealed, despite there being no Jews or Christians there to argue with the Prophet. As usual, Ibn 'Āshūr gives many possible reasons for the revelation of this polemical text in Makkah. The first possible reason he mentioned is that it might be a means of preparation for next phase for Muhammad and his companions in Madinah.⁷⁰²

Sha'rāwī defines *Mujādalāh* or *Muḥājjāh* as debate between two interlocutors, each of whom think they are right and the other wrong. He also defined *Jadal* as debate between two schools of thoughts; each one striving to convince the other of its views with the intention of making the other accept its point of view. The aim behind *Jadal* varies; some start debates to show strength and knowledge, while others intend to reach the truth. Sha'rāwī explained and talked about the etiquettes of debate, when one should make debate and when one should not, the language that should be used, and the tolerance exercised. Therefore, the Qur'an teaches the principles and manners of argumentation with People of the Book, as this will help to bring forth people from disbelief to belief, and from arrogance and defiance to certainty and submission. This cannot be done except with respect and tolerance, as the Qur'an declares in (Q 29: 46).

Sha'rāwī maintains that debate differs from person to person. Debate with an atheist is different than debate with one who believes in God's existence, but believes in a

⁶⁹⁹ Robinson, Neil, *Discovering the Qur'an, A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 2003) pp. 99-124

⁷⁰⁰ MS: Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Al-Dar Al-Tunisiya, 1984), vol. 31, p. 6

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., vol. 14, p. 328

⁷⁰² Ibid., vol. 21, p. 5

partner with Him. It differs even more among those who have the same belief but have different school of thought.⁷⁰³ The Qur'an for instance employs this style of debate with atheists in the following passage, '*Were they created without any agent? Were they the creators?*' (Q 52: 35-36).

This style discusses issues that no one can deny such as the creation of the heavens and earth. It employs a lenient and soft style with the People of the Book as they believe in the Creator, the divine Books, and the messengers, but the difference is their disbelief in the message of Muhammad despite Muslims believing in their messages and messengers.⁷⁰⁴ In his commentary, Sha'rāwī says to such groups, 'I believed in your messengers who came after other messengers; then why do you deny the coming of another messenger? Does this messenger contradict the common principles we have? The answer is no, as all messengers agree on the main principles of creed and morals. Therefore, the Qur'an (Q 29: 46)⁷⁰⁵ employs a lenient style and the best language with the People of the Book because they are not atheists or idolaters or pagans.

The analysis of these polemical passages in the contemporary exegeses demonstrates that they are created to confirm the sense of religious identity. Moreover, the Qur'anic polemics developed over time, mainly as a reactionary measure to events occurring in Muhammad's life. Madinan verses for example speak of the often fraught relationship between the Muslims, Jews and Christians. It can be argued that this should be considered when analysing what the Qur'an has to say about Muslim relationships with those communities.

7.2. Polemics in the Makkan and Madinan Qur'an

The tone of polemics in the Makkan Qur'an differs from that of the Madinan in both style and attitude. In the Makkan Qur'an, for example, polemics is directed more toward the pagans who lived in Makkah during that era, where the challenge of Prophet Muhammad was to invite them to *Tawḥīd* while remaining patient over their relentless abuse. Many polemical Makkan passages discuss the arguments between

⁷⁰³ Ibid., p. 7023

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 7024

⁷⁰⁵ '(Believers), argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly. Say, 'We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are one (and the same); we are devoted to Him.' (Q 29: 46)

Prophet Muhammad and the pagans of Makkah as well as other issues relating to accusations directed towards him – of lying, practising sorcery (Q 22: 30-31), telling tales from previous scriptures (Q 87: 18-19; 53: 36-37; 20: 133; 21: 7, 10, 94). There are numerous passages which warn of severe punishments to the polytheists of Makkah (Q 73: 15-16, 89: 6-14). There is minimal passages of polemics directed toward *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Makkan period; the Madinan passages cover most of the polemical issues relating to *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, such as the concept of *Tahrīf* (distortion of the Scripture), the Chosen People, the divinity of Jesus, salvation, and the notion of the Trinity.⁷⁰⁶

Polemics against the pagans in the Makkan era perhaps suggests common ground with Abrahamic faiths, whereas polemics against *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Madinan era are more distinctive and aim at reinforcing the Islamic identity against Christianity and Judaism. The Qur’anic methodology of polemics is to directly interact with the current circumstances to the extent that many passages are revealed as direct answers to questions addressed to Prophet Muhammad.⁷⁰⁷ Neal Robinson views polemics as encompassing the entire Qur’an without being confined to specific sections. In the early Makkan *Sūrahs*, there is constant interchange between polemics and other Qur’anic subjects such as narratives, signs, controversies, destiny, and the Day of Judgment.⁷⁰⁸ It is noted that polemics in that period focused on refuting the claims of the pagans as well as highlighting major themes of the Islamic creed. Similarly, it is noted that the discourse of polemics is generally harsher toward the pagans than *Ahl Al-Kitāb*.⁷⁰⁹ During the Madinan era, the Qur’anic discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* changes in tone. This is in light of some heretical Jewish groups who believed in ‘Uzayr as the Divine and asserted Jesus’s crucifixion, distorting interpretations of the Torah.

7.3. Polemics in Classical and Contemporary Exegeses

The tone and style of classical exegeses in interpreting the polemical passages on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* is different from contemporary ones. Classical exegeses in some texts abrogate the conciliatory passages which demonstrate a positive attitude towards *Ahl*

⁷⁰⁶ See Zebiri, Kate, *Muslims and Christians face to face*, (Oxford : Oneworld, 1997)

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁸ Robinson, Neil, *Discovering the Qur’an, A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 2003), pp. 99-124

⁷⁰⁹ See Zebiri, Kate, *Muslims and Christians face to face*, (Oxford : Oneworld, 1997)

Al-Kitāb. They incline more towards a harsher attitude through the concept of *Naskh* (abrogation). For example, passage (Q 9: 29) abrogates passage (Q 2: 256).⁷¹⁰ In his commentary on (Q 2:29), Al-Ṭabarī refers to various narrations of *Asbāb Al-Nuzūl*. One narration by Al-Suddī mentioned that the passage was revealed when two sons of a man from Al-Anṣār called al-Husayn, embraced Christianity. Syrian traders who came for business in Madinah invited the two sons to embrace Christianity and they accepted. Abu Al-Husayn came to Prophet Muhammad and asked him to invite the two sons to embrace Islam, but he responded, '(There is) no compulsion in religion.' Al-Ṭabarī mentioned that permission was not given to Muhammad to fight *Ahl Al-Kitāb* during that time. Abu Al-Husayn was sad when Prophet Muhammad did not invite them to embrace Islam. Therefore, passage (Q 4: 65) was revealed. Al-Ṭabarī refers in the end of the narration that this passage was abrogated by passage (Q 9: 29).⁷¹¹ However, not all classical exegeses refer to the issue of abrogation in their commentaries of this passage, for example, Al-Rāzī does not refer to the issue of abrogation, but he explained the issue of free will in *Mu'tazilī* theology, and in *Ahl Al-Sunnah* theology, and clarified the ruling of forcing other groups of faith (whether *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, Magians, pagans, or disbelievers) to embrace Islam.⁷¹² The vast majority of contemporary exegeses do not place much emphasis on the issue of abrogation, unlike classical exegeses. Some contemporary exegetes tend to take an affirmative methodology by referring to the positive passages about *Ahl Al-Kitāb* (Q 2: 256). The texts referring to *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, whether polemical or conciliatory, raise exegetical questions about the relationship between the two types of texts. The discussion around these texts revolves ultimately around distinguishing the faithful from the faithless among the People of the Book and consequently discussing their prospects of salvation.⁷¹³

Classical Muslim scholars, including Al-Ṭabarī and Al-Rāzī, showed less interest in the subject of *Jadal* in the Qur'an, and did not regard it as one of its sciences. On the other hand, contemporary Muslim scholars, including Rashīd Riḍā, Ibn 'Āshūr, and

⁷¹⁰ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 5, p. 410

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

⁷¹² MS: Al-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 3, p. 454.

⁷¹³ Zebiri, Kate. "Polemic and Polemical Language." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 08 March 2016 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/polemic-and-polemical-language-EQCOM_00148

Sha'rāwī, have shown a renewed interest in this subject.⁷¹⁴ The reason for this goes back to the integrity of the reasoning of the Qur'an's content; it cannot be separated from its structure.⁷¹⁵ Moreover, contemporary Muslim exegetes are reluctant to extend the discussion and expound on Qur'anic polemics due to the theological pressures of the modern and secular world – it is now considered intolerant to assert one's own beliefs as true and others' as false. This stance is criticised because it leads to the very thing it aims to censor: unorthodox radical interpretations of classical texts, justifying violence against people of other beliefs. These polemical passages in the Qur'an should be discussed and reinterpreted to comply with modernity, especially as many Muslims live among people of different faiths in the West.⁷¹⁶

Classical exegeses focused more on the interpretation of polemical texts concerning groups of the Jews and Christians of that era; therefore, the occasions of revelation are more common in such exegeses than contemporary exegeses. In his commentary on (Q 2: 139), Al-Ṭabarī maintains that the passage is addressing Muhammad to respond to the Jews and Christians who claim that guidance is only within their religions respectively. Muhammad was asked to reply, saying that 'guidance is with God, who is our and your God; and He will recompense us all.'⁷¹⁷ Al-Rāzī on the other hand mentioned a similar interpretation in one of the *masā'il* on this passage. In the first *mas'alah*, he states that it refers to Jews and Christians who claimed that guidance is solely in their religions. In his second *mas'alah*, Al-Rāzī mentions that it refers to the pagans of Makkah, and in a third *mas'alah*, he said it refers to all exclusivists. Moreover, he explained the differences between exegetes on the polemics with *Ahl al-Kitāb* was in those related to the prophecy of Muhammad and the religion of Islam.⁷¹⁸ These examples show that the classical exegeses always referred to the occasions of revelation and the historical context of the text for the passages related to Jews and Christians, and sometimes also for the pagans of Makkah.

⁷¹⁴ A. Rippin, *The Blackwell companion to the Qur'an*. Oxford (England): Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 268.

⁷¹⁵ Gwynne, Rosalind W., *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an: God's Argument* (2004) p. 205

⁷¹⁶ Sirry, Mun'im, *Scriptural Polemics, The Qur'an and Other Religions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 33

⁷¹⁷ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 3, pp. 120-21

⁷¹⁸ MS: Al-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 2, p. 379

In contemporary exegeses such as Ibn ʿĀshūr's, Sha'rāwī's, and Riḍā, 'there is not much reliance on the occasion of revelation or historical context of the passage. Rather, such exegetes would try to link it with Jews and Christians of every time, not only the time of Muhammad. Sha'rāwī, Ibn ʿĀshūr, and Riḍā, in their commentaries on (Q 2: 239), employ modern language that's easy for people to understand, and link the passage with contemporary Muslim issues. They do not refer to occasions of revelation much, nor do they include narrations of other exegetes, only in rare cases. They use language that criticises Jews and Christians for such claims in every time and place.⁷¹⁹ Sha'rāwī expanded more on the meaning of polemics (*muhājjāh*) and argument (*jadal*) and interpreted the passage using other passages in the Qur'an without referring to too many old narrations or traditions.⁷²⁰ Sha'rāwī views that the polemical discourse on the People of the Book is mainly covered in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, which focused more on the Jews, and *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, which focused the discourse more on Christians. Most polemical passages came as an address to Muhammad, guiding him in his response to the Jews and Christians on the major issues that Islam differs with them on. He maintains that the new message of Muhammad faced three groups of people: the pagans of Makkah, the People of the Book, and the hypocrites.⁷²¹ The argument and polemics with the People of Book occurred more than with the pagans and hypocrites or any other group because, as Sha'rāwī stated, the *Jidāl* came to people of divine and heavenly religions who denied a new divine and heavenly religion. Polemics with pagans, idolaters, and other groups does not occupy much space and was not as necessary.

Similarly, Riḍā presented interesting interpretations related to the polemical passages addressing the People of the Book, where the differences between Jews, Christians, and Muslims are most highlighted. Riḍā agrees with Sha'rāwī and Ibn ʿĀshūr on the culpability of the People of the Book on some of these polemical issues. These issues include the distortion of the Torah and Gospel, the claim of the divinity of Jesus, and the Jews' transgressions and their disobedience to Moses and the Law of God. However, in his commentary on passages (Q 3: 19-20),⁷²² Riḍā relied on his teacher's

⁷¹⁹ MS: Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990) vol. 1, p. 401

⁷²⁰ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 366

⁷²¹ Ibid., p. 887

⁷²² 'True Religion, in God's eyes, is Islam: (devotion to Him alone). Those who were given the Scripture disagreed out of rivalry, only after they had been given knowledge— if anyone denies God's revelations,

views and presented a fresh interpretation and an in-depth explanation of the meaning of Islam and the polemics of the People of the Book with Muhammad.⁷²³ He explained the meaning of the word '*dīn*' (lit. religion), and discussed the definition of the word in classical Arabic, as well its terminological usage. From a linguistic perspective, the word '*dīn*' means reward, recompense, or obedience. Terminologically, it refers to a set of rules, guidelines, and obligations that everyone should follow and practise. There is a difference between *millah* and *dīn*, which are commonly used synonymously to mean religion. *Millah* refers to the laws, while *dīn* refers to obedience to the Lawgiver. He also explained the meaning of the word '*Islām*', which has various meanings in the Arabic language. He states that '*Islām*' is derived from the Arabic word '*aslama*', which can mean to give, as well as to submit and surrender, peace and reconciliation, and even sincerity. Naming the true religion Islam is suitable for every linguistic meaning mentioned above.⁷²⁴ This is proven by another passage which clarifies this meaning (Q 4:125).⁷²⁵ Abraham and other prophets were called Muslims in numerous passages, submitters to the obligations of the Lawgiver.

In his commentary on passage (Q 3: 20), Riḍā discusses the polemics addressed to the People of the Book and the Pagans of Makkah about the relationship and difference between the new Prophetic message and theirs. He referred to the historical context of the passage, stating that the passage was revealed when Muhammad argued with the Christian delegations of Najran. The Prophet Muhammad is asked to inform them: 'I and my followers have sincerely submitted to God. If you would submit to the spirit of the religion, you will be guided. If you do not, then the argument would be in vain and you will become stubborn in argumentation.'⁷²⁶ Riḍā considers their refusal to return to their original religion and abandon the distortion as a closing of the

God is swift to take account— if they argue with you (Prophet), say, 'I have devoted myself to God alone and so have my followers.' Ask those who were given the Scripture, as well as those without one, 'Do you too devote yourselves to Him alone?' If they do, they will be guided, but if they turn away, your only duty is to convey the message. God is aware of His servants. (Q 3: 19-20)

⁷²³ MS: Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990) vol. 3, p. 212

⁷²⁴ Ibid, pp. 212-13

⁷²⁵ *Who could be better in religion than those who direct themselves wholly to God, do good, and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith? God took Abraham as a friend. (Q 4:125)*

⁷²⁶ MS: Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990) vol. 3, p. 214

door to sincere argumentation, as this kind of attitude does not aim at reaching the truth, but is in fact an exercise in futility.

In summary, Riḍā argues in these passages that the religion of God is one, from Adam to Muhammad. Its main spirit is monotheism and submission to the One God and His prophet's guidance. Therefore, every prophet recommended his people to submit to God; and anyone who believed in God and His prophet is a Muslim and will be saved. According to 'Abdu and Riḍā, the Jew who sincerely believes in God, Moses, and the Torah, and abandons division and distortion in his religion, is a Muslim and will be rewarded and achieve salvation. Similarly, they hold that the Christian who sincerely believes in God, Jesus, and the Gospel, and abandons division and distortion in his religion, is a Muslim and will be rewarded and achieve salvation. To support his view that the religion of God, which He sent all His prophets with, is one, and that the division into sects, groups, and nations is prohibited, he referred to another passage (Q 42: 13).⁷²⁷ This passage also warns mankind against sectarianism, which comes as a result of ignorance, fanaticism, and the protection of personal interests. The Qur'an invites all to agree on religion and its main principles, and to be sincere to God in all deeds and actions.⁷²⁸ According to Riḍā, the terms 'Islam' and 'Muslims', which are declared by Abraham and his offspring in many passages, have the same meaning mentioned above; and whoever achieves this meaning is a Muslim and will be saved. As for the word 'Islam' which is used currently for a group of people, it is more of a useful descriptive tool than a validation for the saved people.

The reflection of the polemical issues in contemporary exegetes differs from the classical exegetes reflections. The formers presented new interpretations to these polemical texts on the People of the Book. They elaborated on the relationship between all religions and beliefs and discussed the Qur'anic responses to the claims of the People of the Book and the refutations to their allegations. They also avoided referring to the Israelite narrations and linked the passages of the Qur'an on the People of the Book to the Jews and Christians of modern times. They focused more on the

positive discourse based on reconciliation and harmony, while staying away from clash and conflict, following the view that the aim of the three Abrahamic religions is one (i.e. belief in One God, doing good deeds, perfecting reason and morals, and cultivating and perfecting the soul and body). On the other hand, the classical exegetes did not present much details about the polemical discourse in the Qur'an. Their references to these polemical issues are brief and limited to the era of Muhammad and the environment of their times.

7.4. Polemics against People of the Book

Polemics in the Qur'an deal with Jews, Christians, pagans, disbelievers, and Muslims. It comprises many issues and subjects dealing with creed and belief; scriptures and books; messengers and prophets, the Day of Judgment and life after death and other issues which have been discussed and studied by many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars.⁷²⁹ There are further manifestations of polemics between Moses and Pharaoh, Abraham and his father, Mūsa and *al-Khidr*, and between messengers and their people.⁷³⁰ Naturally, polemics often demonstrate some form of dualism, such as good and evil, truth and falsehood, monotheism and polytheism, and the worldly life and the Hereafter. The Qur'anic discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* is not all polemical, for there are texts which can be described as positive and conciliatory.⁷³¹ In his book, *Tārīkh al-Jadal*, Abu Zahra (d. 1974 CE) refers to the main issues of polemics between Prophet Muhammad and the Jews of Madinah. He also demonstrated that Prophet Muhammad argued with the Jews more than with the Christians, who were less in number in Madinah than the Jews.⁷³² The tone of polemical passages toward the Jews is harsher than that toward the Christians and more criticism is given to the deeds and behaviour of the Jews. Polemical dialogue reflects the reasons for the alternating Qur'anic discourse concerning *Ahl Al-Kitāb*.

Polemics with the People of the Book on issues as creed, birth and miracles of Jesus, salvation, crucifixion and killing of Jesus, the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus has been discussed in detail in the contemporary exegeses. Every exegete focuses more on

⁷²⁹ Adil, Nouriddin, *Mujādalat Ahl al-Kitāb fī al-Qur'an*, (Riyadh: Maktabat ar-Rushd 2007) pp. 365-371

⁷³⁰ A. Rippin, *The Blackwell companion to the Qur'an*. Oxford (England): Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 266.

⁷³¹ Kate. "Polemic and Polemical Language." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Brill Online, University of Exeter, http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/lib/exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/polemic-and-polemical-language-EQCOM_00148

⁷³² Abu Zahra, Muhammad, *Tārīkh al-Jadal*, (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1934) pp. 48-49

rational responses and explanation than the traditional classical exegeses. For instance, Sha'rāwī, in his commentary on passages (Q 4:156-158) regarding Jesus birth and crucifixion maintains that the Jews had no grounds for suspicion regarding the miraculous birth of Jesus. On the day of his birth, God caused the entire Jewish people to witness it, seeing with their own eyes its extraordinary nature, and that it was a result of miracle not illegal sexual intercourse. Thus, God demolished every basis for casting doubt on the birth of Jesus. When Jesus was young, no one accused Mary of either unchastity or Jesus of being born illegitimately. When this unmarried girl of a highly esteemed and pious Israelite family gave birth to a new-born infant, thousands of people of all age groups thronged to her house out of curiosity. Sha'rāwī criticised the Children of Israel for their accusations against Mary, and their denial of major creedal issues related to Jesus.⁷³³

Sha'rāwī employed three things to prove his argument, Arabic language and syntax, logic, and similar passages and their historical contexts. In his commentary on the passages related to Jesus's birth in *Sūrahs Maryam* and *Al-Mā'idah*, Sha'rāwī employed scientific theories to prove the authenticity of the Qur'an.⁷³⁴ Sha'rāwī refers to the meaning of the word '*Shubbiha*' in two narrations. The first one is when they called Jesus for his execution – he came with someone behind him who looked like a man named Tatyanus. When Jesus saw this, God inspired him to look up and find something to raise him up. This confused them and made them question, 'If this is Tatyanus, where is Jesus?' So, they were confused by the resemblance between Tatyanus and Jesus, and God gave the likeness of Jesus to Tatyanus, and they killed the latter.⁷³⁵ The other narration is of when they came in to kill him. They found him with the apostles. Jesus asked them, 'Who wants to appear like me and be killed, and will be in paradise as a result?' What does the apostle want for himself more than paradise? Jesus gave the great prize to any believer. One of the apostles called Sarkhas performed this task.⁷³⁶

Sha'rāwī refers to other narrations and discussed these different narrations and the reasons for their differences. Regardless, he asserts that the search for this matter

⁷³³ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 2789

⁷³⁴ Ibid., p. 2790

⁷³⁵ Ibid., p. 1930

⁷³⁶ Ibid., p. 1930

does not concern Muslims, nor would its answer increase them with anything. It suffices Muslims to believe in what the Qur'an declares. He maintains that these differences will not make any change in Muslims' creed, whether Jesus was raised or died will not make any difference. This is a creedal issue which does not need the approval of the mind. To prove his argument, Sha'rāwī refers to Muhammad's ascension to the heaven, and argues that this is a miraculous incident which Muslims believe in even if reason does not accept it.⁷³⁷

Sha'rāwī discussed the reason why the Christians agree with the Jews on the issue of killing Jesus and his crucifixion. He maintains that they agreed with the Jews because there was no sacred passage or text elaborating on its nature. Now they should refuse the issue of crucifixion as there is a sacred text, the Qur'an, which denies its occurrence, regardless of divinity. Islam comes to absolve Jesus of this issue and appoints his followers to absolve him of it. Unfortunately, they did not pay attention to the Islamic view point. Sha'rāwī criticised Jews and Christians for their stance toward the miraculous issues related to Jesus such as birth with no father, divinity, killing, and crucifixion.⁷³⁸

7.5. Examples of Polemical Issues with the People of the Book

Three examples of polemical issues with *Ahl Al-Kitāb* will be discussed and analysed in order to demonstrate how classical and contemporary exegetes have understood and interpreted these passages relating to these issues. These examples are: Monotheism (*Tawḥīd*), salvation (*Najāh*), and distortion (*Tahrīf*). Although the negative discourse about *Ahl Al-Kitāb* is not on the same level and degree, the Qur'an refers to other polemical issues such as disobedience to their scriptures and prophets (Q 2: 75, 5: 41, desiring to lead Muslims astray (Q 2: 109, 3: 100), failing to believe in Muhammad's message (Q 3: 70, 5: 81); being religiously complacent or exclusivist (Q 2: 80, 5: 18), being divided amongst themselves (Q 5: 14, 98: 4), elevating their religious leaders to a quasi-divine status (Q 9: 31), and failing to follow their own religious teachings properly (Q 5: 47).⁷³⁹

⁷³⁷ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 2797

⁷³⁸ Ibid, vol. 5, 2794

⁷³⁹ Zebiri, Kate, *Polemic and Polemical Language*, Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an, Brill Online, University of Exeter. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/lib/exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/polemic-and-polemical-language-EQCOM_00148

7.5.1. Monotheism (*Tawḥīd*)

The Qur'anic passages concerning Jesus are polemical in tone, due to the belief that they are opposed to the original Christian teachings. The Qur'an in passage (Q 5: 75)⁷⁴⁰ highlights the nature of Jesus, son of Mary, and that he was only a messenger. Other messengers had come and gone before him, his mother was a virtuous woman, both ate food like other mortals. He is also frequently described in the Qur'an as Jesus the son of Mary, *ʿĪsā Ibn Maryam*, sixteen times. In contrast to the New Testament, where this description as son of Mary is made only once. Despite the special status of Jesus in Islam, the Qur'an strongly rejects his divinity, and emphasises on his human nature and servitude to God. The polemical discourse in the Qur'an refuses all divine characteristics and attributes of Jesus, such as him being God, the son of God, or one part of a trinity forming God.⁷⁴¹ *Sūrah Al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q 112: 1-4) summarises the meaning of *Tawḥīd*, and clearly outlines the divine nature of God which none of His creation share with Him. In Christianity, Jesus the son of Mary has been worshipped as a divine figure. They claim him as the son of God. The notion of divine offspring is clearly rejected in Islam. Therefore, it can be concluded that Jesus is not God's son, since God does not beget nor is He begotten.⁷⁴²

Both the classical and contemporary exegetes had difficulty in accepting the doctrines of sonship, human divinity and trinity, because accepting such claims puts the belief in monotheism or *Tawḥīd* at risk. The contemporary exegetes and scholars have three main views concerning the Christian doctrine, the first, it often contradicts of the principle of '*Tawḥīd*' taught by all the prophets, as the Qur'an confirms that all the messages of the prophets 'One true God' is the same. Secondly, the Christian claim of the sonship and divinity of Jesus was later product of the church, and Muslims deny any doctrines that was not taught by Jesus himself. Moreover, it is argued that the doctrine of Trinity, that God is three is not found anywhere in the Bible itself. However, Christians theologians argue though the words do not appear in the Bible the idea is present. Lastly, Muslim scholars were not able to make any reconciliation with the

⁷⁴⁰ 'The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; other messengers had come and gone before him; his mother was a virtuous woman; both ate food (like other mortals). See how clear We make these signs for them; see how deluded they are..' (Q 5:75)

⁷⁴¹ Sa'īd, Abdullah, *Introduction to the Qur'an: History, Interpretation and Approaches*, (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 134-135

⁷⁴² Ibid. (pp.132-134)

Theory of Trinity and the *Tawhīd* in the Qur'an, thus they concluded the irrationality of trinity in the Christian theology.⁷⁴³

Christian theologians have also admitted the complexity of the concept of trinity, which they themselves have yet to grasp fully. In Christian theological writings, the concept of trinity is often marginalised and barely discussed in detail. The Qur'an on the other hand, discusses the claim to sonship and divinity to Jesus and Trinity as the central criticism of the Christian doctrines. Contemporary exegetes have approached this discussion in various ways, some polemical while others conciliatory. It remains, the argument between Christian and Muslim relations and the concept of God is still wide. The theological debate between the Christians and Muslims in the case of trinity, is not that of monotheism but rather his nature because both faiths defiantly attest to the uniqueness and monotheism in comparison to polytheism. Although Muslim exegetes emphasize monotheism in a clear and strict fashion, Christians allow 'differentiation without fragmentation'. Both faiths discuss monotheism but express their ways differently.⁷⁴⁴

In his commentary on the polemical passage (Q 9: 30) of Al-Manār exegesis, the contemporary exegete Rashīd Riḍā refuted the claim of the Jews and the Christians that God has a son and introduces details about the history of 'Uzayr and his status amongst his people as well as details about Jesus's status. Riḍā states that Ezra was a follower of Moses who was eager and zealous to spread the Torah. Accounting historical recordings, Ezra collected and restored the lost or forgotten parts of the Torah, as well as making changes and adding his own words into it. The Jews, indebted to him, consequently sanctified him and still sanctify him, such that perhaps some of them perhaps called him '*Ibn Allah*' as an honour to him, or perhaps intended other meaning.⁷⁴⁵ Riḍā concludes that those who declared Ezra as the son of God are the Jews of Madinah. However, he adds that the claim may have been said by other Jews before the time of Muhammad, but it is not certain. He cites an incident during the life of Prophet Muhammad where a number of Jews came to visit him. During a conversation they said, 'How can we follow you when you deny the Divine status of

⁷⁴³ Sirry, Mun'im, *Scriptural Polemics, The Qur'an and Other Religions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 165

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., 166

⁷⁴⁵ MS: Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'ah Al-Masriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990) vol. 10, p. 286

Ezra as the son of God?’⁷⁴⁶ Moreover, the contemporary exegeses are all in agreement in rejecting the concept of the trinity (Q 4: 171) which contradicts the concept of monotheism in Islam. Each exegete interpreted this passage in his own methodology, but they all concluded by rejecting this claim.

There are certain passages in the Qur’an that give testimony to Jesus being the ‘word of God’ (Q 3: 42, 4: 171). This does not imply that Jesus is God, rather it’s figuratively referring to his mission of defining God’s word to the people.⁷⁴⁷ However, Christians in general believe Jesus is the incarnation of the eternal word of God, the personified revelation of God. The historian Ibn Ishāq, in his *Sīrah*, cites an incident whereby some Christians from Najran came to visit Prophet Muhammad. There were some who said Jesus is God, or He is the son of God, and others who said he is the third of three, God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit. In response to these statements, the Qur’anic passage (Q 5: 73) was revealed. The understanding of Trinity from the Qur’anic perspective is that the Christians believed in three Gods. Of course, some Christians deny worshipping Mary the mother of Jesus, and consequently fault Qur’an due to that passage. However, according to Rashīd Riḍā, the worship of Mary did take place in the Eastern and Western churches of the Constantine sect called Maryamiyya, later rejected by the protestant denomination.⁷⁴⁸

In his commentary on (Q 3:59), Ibn ‘Āshūr discusses the status of Jesus and his creation. He maintains that this passage means that if Jesus’s miraculous birth is enough evidence that he should be regarded either as God or as the son of God, then there are even stronger grounds to apply this to Adam. For, while Jesus was born without a father, Adam was born with neither father nor mother.⁷⁴⁹ The doctrine of the trinity is an example of excessiveness in the religion. Muslims have also been warned by Prophet Muhammad , ‘Do not elevate me like the Christians elevated the son of Mary’. The Christian creed of trinity came in to existence as a result of deep love and respect for Jesus, which was then exaggerated to the point whereby he was given the

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 287

⁷⁴⁷ Sa’īd, Abdullah, *Introduction to the Qur’an: History, Interpretation and Approaches*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 148

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 156-157.

⁷⁴⁹ MS: Riḍā, M. Rashīd, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, (Cairo: Al-Hay’ah Al-Masriyyah al-‘Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990) vol. 3, p. 263

title 'son of God', giving birth to a new creed to the existing Christian doctrines of Jesus.⁷⁵⁰

7.5.2. Salvation (*Najāh*)

Salvation is one of the Qur'anic polemical issues that Muslim classical and contemporary exegetes have discussed. They have differed concerning interpretation of the texts related to *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, hence its application to them. Three Qur'anic passages state that the Jews, Christians, and other groups can get reward and attain salvation like Muslims if they believe in one God and do good deeds – but this is not absolute. Similarly, some passages concerning the Christians confirm the possibility of attaining salvation if they follow their faith, and this has been mentioned in many texts. However, other passages severely criticise them for claiming that they are the only ones who will attain salvation, that their faith is the only true religion, as well as their belief in the divinity of Jesus, their belief in the trinity, and their practise of monasticism.⁷⁵¹

The Qur'anic discourse employs various terms to refer to salvation. It uses all of *Al-Fawz Al-'Aẓīm* (great attainment) (Q 4: 13, 5: 119, 9: 72), *Al-Fawz Al-Kabīr* (big attainment) (Q 85: 11), *Al-Fawz Al-Mubīn* (clear attainment) (Q 6: 16, 45: 30), *Falāḥ* (success), *muflihūn* (the successful ones), to refer the final purpose of life. Many other words are used to refer to a similar meaning of salvation, such as *anjā* (save) and *anqadha* 'rescue' (Q 2: 50, 7: 72, 3: 103). It does not mention the term '*Khalāṣ*' (salvation) like the Christian concept, which means deliverance from the power of sin, and death for reconciliation with God.⁷⁵²

Three passages related to the issue of salvation have also been discussed in both classical and contemporary exegeses. These three passages (Q 2: 62, 5: 69, and 22: 17) read: '*The (Muslim) believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians – all those*

⁷⁵⁰ Sa'īd, Abdullah, *Introduction to the Qur'an: History, Interpretation and Approaches*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 162

⁷⁵¹ Vajda, G.. '*Ahl al-Kitāb*' Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, University of Exeter. 19 March 2016 http://0-referenceworks.brillonline.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ahl-al-Kitāb-SIM_0383

⁷⁵² Borrmans, Maurice. "*Salvation*." Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an, Brill Online, University of Exeter. 19 March 2016., http://0-dx.doi.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00368

who believe in God and the Last Day and do good – will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve.’ (Q 2: 62)

‘For the believers, the Jews, the Sabians, and the Christians– those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds– there is no fear: they will not grieve.’ (Q 5: 69)

‘As for the believers, those who follow the Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection; God witnesses all things. (Q 22: 17)

Al-Ṭabarī maintains that these passages, which contain various societies from other faiths, refer to the possibility of salvation for *Ahl Al-Kitāb* and that they will be rewarded or punished according to their belief in God and their deeds. Other societies, such as, polytheists (*Mushrikīn*) and other groups that worship idols, animals, humans, stars or the sun and the moon, will be in loss in the Hereafter.⁷⁵³

Al-Ṭabarī in his commentary mentioned the story of Salmān, the Persian on passage (Q 2: 62). He and a group of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* were doing good deeds and believed in their religion. Salmān asked Prophet Muhammad about their destiny. Prophet Muhammad answered Salman that they would be in Hellfire.⁷⁵⁴ This ruling is before the passage’s revelation, then it was revealed to tell Muhammad about the destiny of such groups of faith who believe in God and did good deeds. Prophet Muhammad then mentioned to Salmān that whoever believed in God, his Book, and messenger, and died before the next message, would be saved. In other words, the Jew who believed in the Torah and Moses before the advent of Jesus would be saved; and the Christian who believed in the Gospel and Jesus before the advent of Muhammad would be saved. Crucially, whoever was alive during or after the revelation of the next message would not be saved.⁷⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī does not mention clearly the destiny of a person who live after the advent of Islam, but this message of Islam does not reach him or her clearly.

⁷⁵³ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl ayil-Qur’an*, (Damascus: Mu’asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 2. pp. 145-147

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., vol.2, p. 150

In his commentary on passage (Q 4: 123),⁷⁵⁶ Sha'rāwī discussed the issue of salvation for the People of the Book and for Muslims, and the measures for achieving it. Is it affiliation to Judaism, Christianity or Islam that will lead to Salvation and paradise? Sha'rāwī maintains that mere affiliation to religion without actions will not achieve salvation, even if the person is affiliated to Islam. The aim of religion is not to take the name but to act and practise. Hopeful and wishful thinking by itself will not benefit. The final result shall not be in accordance with the Muslims' wishes nor in accordance with the wishes of the People of the Book. Whoever does evil shall be recompensed for it and he shall find no protector and no helper for himself against God. The one who does good deeds, whether man or woman, provided that they believe and are sincere, will enter Paradise and they will not be cheated in the least of their rightful reward. Sha'rāwī views that the address in the passage can be for those who called themselves Muslims as well as for those who called themselves Jews or Christians. If it is to Muslims, then God clarifies for them the issue is not one of name, but actions and practice. If the address is to the People of the Book, then God will reward those who act and work even if they do not adhere to Islam, but the judgment in the Last Day returns to Him Who will judge between all.⁷⁵⁷ Sha'rāwī, in his commentary on (Q 2: 62), says that '*alladhīna āmanū*' refers to the previous nations since Adam until Jesus. This means that God would like to combine them all under the new religion – Islam – requesting that the followers of these religions believe in Muhammad . He does not refer to the issue of salvation, but that their destiny will be decided by God on the Day of Judgement.⁷⁵⁸

There are three other passages that also refer to the superiority of Islam over other religions, and they are interpreted differently by classical and contemporary exegetes, discussing whether salvation includes *Ahl Al-Kitāb* or not. These passages (Q 3: 19, 3: 85, and 5: 3) describe Islam as a '*dīn*' which is generally rendered as 'religion'. Al-Ṭabarī agrees that the meaning of the word *dīn* in these passages means obedience and submission to God, which also coincides with the meaning in Arabic. The word Islam means submission to God, which connotes monotheism. When one contemplates the content of these texts in light of Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis, it becomes

⁷⁵⁶ 'It will not be according to your hopes or those of the People of the Book: anyone who does wrong will be requited for it and will find no one to protect or help him against God.(4:123)

⁷⁵⁷ MS: Al-Sha'rāwī, M. Mutwallī, *Hawla al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yawm, 1980), p. 1835

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

clear that salvation can be achieved for Jews and Christians if they believe in the oneness of God, worship Him alone, do good deeds, and believe in the Last Day. They also maintain that other faith groups would likewise be rewarded if they believe and work righteousness.⁷⁵⁹

During the medieval ages, the concept of salvation in the Qur'an was that whoever denies Islam as the true religion is considered as a disbeliever, and would therefore not attain salvation in the hereafter. It was popular among the early Muslim generations to believe that Islam is the only true religion, referring to passage (Q 3: 85). Therefore, the dominant medieval theological position held a strong position that there is no salvation outside of Islam.⁷⁶⁰ However, contemporary theologians have revisited this concept and explored whether salvation is reserved only for Muslims. They attempted to explain the passages of the Qur'an which deal with salvation in relation to guidance in worshipping the one true God. The integral word '*dīn*' must be properly explained and understood before conjecturing who can and cannot receive salvation according to the Qur'an.⁷⁶¹

In reference to passage (Q 4: 125), contemporary scholars like 'Abdu and Riḍā suggested that the universal message brought by all the prophets is the same, despite the diversity in obligations and acceptable forms of behaviour. Quoting Muhammad 'Abdu, he says that 'the true Muslim in the judgement of the Qur'an is he who does not associate others in worship with God and sincerely does good deeds, regardless of the religious community (*millah*) he might be in, and regardless of the time and place in which he might exist.' It is interesting to note that 'Abdu's interpretation differs from that which was held by previous Qur'anic exegetes, who concluded that *Ahl Al-Kitāb* have distorted the revelation that was sent to them. As a result, Islam is a more authentic deliverance of the divine will and holds supremacy over them. According to Riḍā, it is not the revelations that were distorted; rather, it was the people who differed amongst themselves concerning what was revealed, consequently moving away from the spirit of the message and forming into conflicting schools of thought.⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁹ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 6. pp. 273-77

⁷⁶⁰ Sa'īd, Abdullah, *Introduction to the Qur'an: History, Interpretation and Approaches*, (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 65-67

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 65-66

⁷⁶² Ibid., p. 69

It is clear from the nature of Prophet Muhammad's confirmation of previous scriptures that the details of his Sharī'ah are not in total agreement with theirs, and that he was not required to follow their practices. Riḍā's exploration is a departure from medieval exegesis of the Qur'an. Riḍā argues, when commenting on passage (Q 2: 65), that a community's disbelief in Prophet Muhammad does not deny them salvation. In fact, it is not affiliation to a particular religious group which deems one worthy of salvation; but one's *Tawḥīd* and good deeds.⁷⁶³ Accordingly, *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*, wherein the supremacy of Islam over all other religions is argued, is misunderstood. In agreement with 'Abdu, Riḍā believes that sectarianism is the path of previous communities to whom scriptures were revealed, and this was the cause of their aversion from the path to salvation. He urges Muslims to adopt the view of the Qur'an, which is universal – anyone who desires salvation should believe in God and devoutly perform good deeds, seeking His pleasure alone.⁷⁶⁴

The diversity of Muslim exegetes' views makes it tough to label the formers' pursuits as inclusivist, exclusivist or pluralistic endeavours in relation to other faiths. A typology of Christianity in this regard can be made, split by three ways. The first is exclusivism, which is – while believing that other religions may contain some wisdom – its religion is the only path to salvation. Inclusivism suggests that the truth may lie in other faiths as well, while maintaining that the revelation of God is, in the classical understanding of the typology, is definitively Christian. Pluralism accepts that no one tradition can claim to possess the sole truth, and pushes to a God-centric view of faith rather than a religious-centric one. Examples of each can be found in the Christian tradition. This threefold typology was first applied to Christianity, but it is now being applied to Islamic thinkers as well. Some scholars have disagreed with the above typology, rejecting it as faulty and untenable. One of the reasons provided for this is that it fails to deliver on the question of salvation for the unbeliever in clear terms. The second more obvious one is that each type is exclusivist by nature. Other critics further argue that there are actually more than three types of religious outlook, such as restrictivism and universalism (i.e. not all will be saved, and all will be saved, respectively). None of the

⁷⁶³ Ibid. p.72

⁷⁶⁴ Sirry, Mun'im, *Scriptural Polemics, The Qur'an and Other Religions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 72

three categories can be neatly applied to any of the Muslim scholars either, since they are exclusivists in some aspects but inclusivists in others.⁷⁶⁵

7.5.3. Distortion (*Tahrīf*)

Although the Qur'an confirms that the previously revealed Books contain guidance, light, and wisdom from God, and acknowledges the prophecy of Moses and Jesus, it is unwavering in its criticism of some groups of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* who failed to uphold God's covenant and distorted their Books (Q 2: 75, 3: 78). Therefore, all Muslim exegetes, classical and contemporary, unanimously agree that the Gospel and the Torah have been subject to *Tahrīf*. They do however differ on the meaning of distortion.⁷⁶⁶

Classical and contemporary scholars differ about the type of distortion of the Torah and the Gospel. Some scholars, such as Al-Bairūnī, view that the Jews and Christians made changes to the texts of the Gospel. Others, such as Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406 CE) , view that the texts were wrongly interpreted. Quoting the Qur'anic passage (Q 5: 13), Al-Ṭabarī suggests that the texts of revealed scripture have been changed through false interpretations by some groups, and that these interpretations were written down and attributed to God. The word '*yuḥarrifunah*', according to this understanding, meant they altered its meanings.⁷⁶⁷ Two words in reference to this are '*yuḥarrifūn*' whereby the meaning of the revealed words have been either distorted or parts of it forgotten; and '*baddala*', where wrongdoers substituted, changed, or exchanged the word of God from the words originally revealed.⁷⁶⁸

According to Al-Ṭabarī, *Tahrīf* may mean concealment, and he refers to the Qur'anic passage (Q 2: 174) as proof. He quotes further evidence from this passage in (Q 29: 157), which outlines the description of Prophet Muhammad that was revealed in the Torah and the Gospel. Furthermore, in the Gospel, Jesus foretold the prophethood of Muhammad in which he is named 'Ahmad', which is a derivative of the same *ḥamada* root. Al-Ṭabarī suggests that the form of concealment in this case is their failing to

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁶ Sa'īd, Abdullah, *Introduction to the Qur'an: History, Interpretation and Approaches*, (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 146 -147

⁷⁶⁷ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 2, pp. 246-48

⁷⁶⁸ Sa'īd, Abdullah, *Introduction to the Qur'an: History, Interpretation and Approaches*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 148

recognise Muhammad as well as the signs that indicate his prophethood, which are found in both the Jewish and Christian scriptures.⁷⁶⁹

In another classical commentary, Al-Rāzī in his argument on *Tahrīf* alludes to the Qur'anic passages (Q 5: 13-14), and includes the statement, '*The Jews who distort the meaning of the passage*'. According to him, these passages refer to people's misleading interpretation of the instructions from God, in contrast to changes made to the actual text. The argument he puts forward is that scripture which has been transmitted through a large number of followers is unlikely to be changed. If any change were to take place, then this would occur during the early stages of a community's history, when the followers are few in number.⁷⁷⁰ In the passages he quotes (Q 2: 75, 2: 79), he refers to the possibilities of *Tahrīf* in the meaning and in the actual text. He also conjectures other possibilities about the timings of the *Tahrīf*, and whether it occurred by groups at the time of Moses or Muhammad.⁷⁷¹ If the *Tahrīf* occurred at the time of Moses, it means that they did not distort the passages related to Muhammad; but if it occurred at the time of Muhammad, it means that they most likely made *Tahrīf* of the passages related to his prophecy.⁷⁷² There are other reasons for *Tahrīf*; such as accumulating wealth and power.⁷⁷³ Therefore, the word *Tahrīf* may have two meanings; one is to change the word of God and the second is to deliberately and incorrectly interpret its meaning (Q 3: 72-78).⁷⁷⁴

The term *Mawāḍi'* has various meanings in Arabic, sometimes it means places and in others it refers to changing the meaning. *Tahrīf* also has other meanings such as changing the way of recitation. This means that they twist their tongues when they recited it to the Muslims of Madinah as it is referred to in (Q 3: 78). It also might mean *Tahrīf* of the copies they prepared for sale (see Q 2: 72). *Tahrīf* might mean omission of some passages such as the passages which foretell Prophet Muhammad's coming as a messenger.⁷⁷⁵ In their works of *Sīrah*, Ibn Ishāq (d. 768 CE) and Ibn Sa'd (d. 844

⁷⁶⁹ MS: Al-Ṭabarī, M. Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl ayil-Qur'an*, (Damascus: Mu'asasat al-Risalah, 2000), vol. 10, p. 129

⁷⁷⁰ MS: Al-Rāzī, M. Fakhr al-Dīn, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr wa Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Husaniyyah, 1967), vol. 2, p. 163

⁷⁷¹ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 165-66

⁷⁷² Ibid., vol. 2, p. 165

⁷⁷³ Ibid., p. 171

⁷⁷⁴ Parrinder, Geoffrey, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1965, 1965) pp. 146-147

⁷⁷⁵ Watt, W. M., *Muslims-Christians Encounters, Perceptions and Misperceptions*, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 30-34

CE) also refer to narrations regarding the concealment of passages about the prophethood of Muhammad. Ibn Ishāq narrated that there was physical concealment – sticking pages together or obliterating a passage; and this was intended to dupe the illiterate followers. He also refers to the famous story of the Christian monk Baḥīra who recognised Prophet Muhammad from the descriptions he found in his Book.⁷⁷⁶

Sirry maintains that the central argument put forth by Muslims in respect to the *Taḥrīf* of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* scriptures is the ‘different theory of revelation and canonization between the Muslims on the one hand and *Ahl Al-Kitāb* on the other’. Muslims, generally regard the Qur’an as the revealed word of God, sent to Muhammad orally through the Arch angel Gabriel and written down on parchments during his lifetime and organised according to Divine Will. The Qur’an was traditionally preserved verbally and scantily in written form. In latter era of Islam, the Qur’an took its written form. Thus, the canonization of the Qur’an is considered to have taken place at a very early stage of its revelation in comparison to *Ahl Al-Kitāb* scriptures.⁷⁷⁷ ‘Canonization is the act of officially determining what is authentic and authoritative to a body of scripture and what is not’

Nonetheless, the conceptualization of scripture is problematic in respect to the Jews and Christians, unlike the Qur’an the Jewish and Christian scriptures is regarded by modern exegetes to be the handy work of its followers, that is human understanding was inculcated in its compilation when it later canonized or changed by their respective scholars. The Bible is also regarded to be the word of Jesus followers and not that of God or a prophet. Christians hold the belief; the word of the bible was inspiration by the Holy spirit. Therefore, the manners of revelation concerning the three Abrahamic religions is predominately different in its nature. which Muslim reformers have failed to highlight in the claim to scriptural *Taḥrīf*. According to Jews and Christians the element of human involvement and later canonization does not indicate *Taḥrīf* to them. Therefore, if Muslim scholars are to contemplate the theory of scriptural *Taḥrīf* they need to take the manners of revelation into consideration, otherwise a blanket argument which already exists will remain strong.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 34-35

⁷⁷⁷ Sirry, Mun'im, *Scriptural Polemics, The Qur'an and Other Religions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) pp. 130-131

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 131

The ambiguity of Muslim scholar's treatment of the Bible may reflect the ambiguity of the Qur'anic position itself. The Qur'an takes a dialectical approach of 'affirmation and rejection about Jewish and Christian scriptures. At times the Qur'an speaks of the Torah and Bible to be in harmony with the message of the Qur'an and on the other hand the Jews and Christians are criticized for the lack of regard towards their scriptures with respected esteem. The charges put forth by the Qur'an are that of distortion, concealment and corruption of their scriptures. The passages of *Tahrif* in the Qur'an suggest that some people of the book engaged in 'interpretative distortion' while others in written form. This argument is useful, the ambiguity suggests both types of distortion has taken place.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 132

Conclusion

In this study, I have focused on the analysis of the Qur'anic discourse regarding the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) in order to critically examine to what extent the classical exegesis of Al-Ṭabarī, and the contemporary two exegeses of Ibn 'Āshūr, and Sha'rāwī understand and contextualise the passages relating to them. I have demonstrated the exegetical discourse and interpretation of these texts and assessed their historical context and occasions of revelation, and compared the methods in which these exegeses reflect the People of the Book. I have investigated the different ways and various types of Qur'anic discourse and analysis of these types in the selected exegeses. I have also given an overview of the environment and methodology of these exegetes in order to find out the genre of their understanding to these passages.

Since the early days of Islam, exegesis has been a significant discipline as it is considered the primary source of the Islamic religious sciences, and the majority of other Islamic studies rely on the meaning and explanation of the Qur'anic text. This importance stems from the Muslim attitude towards the Qur'an, regarding exegesis as a matter of theory and practice. Exegesis is an ongoing practice and fundamental requirement in order to understand the relevance of the Qur'an in any time and situation. Therefore, exegesis is required due to the variability in individual human intellectual ability; some may need assistance to understand the implied meaning. Due to its sophisticated nature, some passages of the Qur'an are based on specific assumptions that are not clear to the public, while other passages or words contain more than one meaning which can only be explained by specialist scholars and exegetes.

Therefore, Muslim exegetes and scholars have relied on *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl* to interpret the apparent and deep meaning of the passages relating to *Ahl Al-Kitāb*. They debated the differences between the meaning of the terms *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl*, a term frequently used by Al-Ṭabarī in his *Tafsīr: Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āyil-Qur'ān*. Classical scholars like Al-Zarkashī defines the term *Tafsīr* as the explanation of the various meanings of a Qur'anic passage. This includes clarification of the occasion of revelation, the historical references, the place or period of revelation (Makkah or Madinah), clear or unclear, abrogated or abrogating, general or specific. In this

context, *Ta'wīl* denotes the subtle objective meaning that is deduced from the passage. In comparison, *Tafsīr* can be considered as the characteristic of the general explanation of a passage, with the aim of discovering exoteric meaning and application; while *Ta'wīl* is the science of interpreting the general as well as the specific and subtle meanings of the words. Exegetes note that the difference between *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl* is that *Tafsīr* is concerned with the transmission of tradition (*riwāyah*), while *Ta'wīl* is concerned with the deeper comprehension (*dirāyah*) of the text's inner meaning. Mun'im Sirry maintains that *Tafsīr* has been classified as the study of explicating the Qur'anic text in the absence of the social realities in which it first emerged. Both *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl* or (*riwāyah*) and (*dirāyah*) are used by both the classical and the contemporary exegetes and aid in understanding the Qur'anic discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, their virtues and vices.

After analysis of the Qur'anic passages relating to the People of the Book in the works Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī, the study has concluded that there are various types of discourses and categorizations of communities from other faiths that emerge from these passages. These types have been classified into two perspectives: the first perspective classifies this discourse into explicit/direct, implicit/indirect, and polemical; and the second one classifies it into positive, negative, and polemical discourse. Muslim exegetes have explained and contextualised these passages of these types in their commentary; each in his own methodology. The explicit discourse refers to the direct address from God to *Ahl Al-Kitāb*, and it calls them by direct address or names. The implicit discourse refers to the indirect address to the Children of Israel, which is related to their sacred symbols and key figures, and appears in several places in the Qur'an, with a positive tone toward the sacred symbols and a varying tone towards Jews and Christians themselves and their religious leaders. The third discourse refers to the polemics and dialogue with People of the Book. The categorisation and qualities mentioned in these passages evoke a judgment about reward or punishment.

Other perspectives which emerged from these passages are: positive, negative and polemical. The positive discourse is evident in the passages that reveal the good characteristics and qualities of the Jews and Christians in the Makkan and Madinan passages of the Qur'an. It also reveals the common values shared by the Jews, Christians, and Muslims, affirming the guidance in their revelations (Q 3: 3-4) and highlighting the common features of the three faiths (Q 3: 64). These good qualities

are exemplified in the Life of Moses and Jesus; following their path, and the guidance of the Torah and the Gospel. The positive tone also portrays their Books, messengers, and places of worship; and a varying tone portrays Jews and Christians, their rabbis, priests, monks, and their followers in general.

The negative discourse is exemplified in the bad qualities, disobedience to God's commandments, breaking the rules of the Torah and the Gospel, failing to practise their religion, denying the prophethood of Muhammad, false claims and allegations, and following their whims and desires at the expense of God's guidance for them. This type of discourse regarding the Jews and/or Christians does not refer to all of them. Thus, this categorisation of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* into a positive and negative moralistic perspective, praising those who are balanced, just, submissive to God, steadfast, compassionate, merciful, testify in favour of the truth, rejectors of evil and not arrogant. It denounces those of them who sin and commit evil. The overriding classification is the differentiation between those who believe and those who disbelieve.

The polemical discourse is exemplified in the arguments regarding several issues, and appears in both Makkan and Madinan passages, and it displays distinct styles and attitudes. Such polemical and critical discourse is common, and it is directed mainly to the Children of Israel i.e. Jews and Christians. There are also polemics that includes Muslims who disobey God's commandments or break the rules of the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad. The analysis of the polemical passages in the selected exegeses reveals that these passages are designed to determine a sense of religious identity.

The study also discovers that the Qur'anic discourse does not equalise between all Jews or Christians nor does it consider them all the same—except on a few numbered occasions—with reference to specific groups amongst them. Most of these Qur'anic passages include distinguishing words or phrases, like '*minhum*' (some of them), '*kathīran minhum*' (most of them), '*illā qalīlan minhum*' (except a few of them), '*aktharahum*' (the majority of them), '*minhum muhtadin wa kathīrun minhum fāsiqūn*' (some of them are guided but the majority are transgressors), '*fa ātayna alladhīna āmanū minhum ajrahum wa kathīrun minhum fāsiqūn*' (so We gave a reward to those of them who believed, but many of them were lawbreakers) (Q 57: 27).

Furthermore, the textual discourse analysis of these passages also demonstrates that there are multi-layered patterns and themes that emerge from them, one of which is the proliferation of categories of the groups. This is indicative of the Qur'an's ongoing classification of humankind at a religious, social, moral and dogmatic level. Formal religious designations—Jews, Christians, Sabians, Magians—and the specification of particular sub-groups like Christian monks and priests lead to less clearly defined yet descriptive phrases like *those who followed (Jesus)*, and *idolaters*. This confirms the ambivalent attitude and the variety among their religious commitment to God. The contextualisation of these passages also reveals that the Qur'anic discourse is directed to some groups of Jews, or some groups of Christians, or both. They also reveal that God will hold everyone accountable: Jews, Christians, Muslims and people of other faiths. It can be strongly argued that both the classical and contemporary exegetes do not put all Christians, Jews, or Muslims on the same pedestal, rather, they are more subtle in their categorisation.

In addition, the exegeses' delimitation controls the depiction of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* identity, limiting divine approval to a small number of them, whereas a larger community are condemned and is subjected to a range of religious accusations and denunciation. The minority group are those who believe in God and the Last Day, do good deeds, followed the *Injīl* in its uncorrupted form. The Qur'anic discourse presents this community almost as a theological concept, bearing little if not any resemblance to present or past sociological manifestations of the community of *Ahl Al-Kitāb*. It also presents various definitions to the identity of *Ahl Al-Kitāb*; when it describes them as those are *'ūtū Al-Kitāb* (those who have been given the Book), or *Ahl Al-Injīl* (people of the Gospel), *Al-Ladhīna Hādū* (those who follow Judaism), and *Naṣārā* (Christians or supporters of Jesus).

However, the exegetes have not given explicit interpretation whether this term refers to People of the Book who met Muhammad in Madinah only, or People of the Book at the time of Moses and Jesus or people of the Book at all times and places. They also have not given clear explanation as to which group of Jews or Christians these texts are intended or meant. But, it could include all groups of Jews and Christians, even the later groups of them, unless there is a context or a clear reference to that past history, because the Qur'an does not specify clearly which groups. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not mention in his traditions specific groups of People of the

Book. Therefore, the Qur'anic materials about them might apply to all who follow the Torah or the Gospel in every environment and time. In other words, the term may extend to include every Jew and Christian who follow the Torah or the Gospel at any time and place. Divisions and the sects we see nowadays amongst the Jews and Christians are still considered and called followers of Judaism and Christianity. Similarly, the divisions and various groups amongst Muslims such as *Sunnī*, *Shī'a*, *Ṣūfī*, *Salafī*, *Ikhwānī* are all considered Muslims and called followers of Islam. When the Qur'an addresses Muslims, it does not intend to be for a specific group of Muslims.

The thesis has also found out that Al-Ṭabarī confined his interpretation to the Arabian peninsula, Abyssinia, and Byzantium regions. He has given a varied but narrow and unsubtle explanation for the passages pertaining to People of the Book during the period of Muhammad. The reason for this might be the lack of Jews and Christians around him during his own lifetime, which might have forced him to restrict their interpretations to the previous era. He also confined the portrayal of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* within the era of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. He depicted identity of the Jews and the Christians in that era and limited their identity to a minority of them. He also defined the identity of this minority and described them as those who believe in God and the Last Day and exert themselves in goodness. They are also defined as those who guarded God's revelation in its pristineness and kept themselves pure from eventual dogmatic aberrations of their coreligionists. They are identified as those who were in anticipation of God's final prophet who would present fresh revelation, fulfilling that which Moses and Jesus had brought. Thus, Al-Ṭabarī did not discuss as many issues related to People of the Book as the contemporary exegetes did. Most of the classical exegetes including Al-Ṭabarī introduce an overview or insights on the values, beliefs, practices of *Ahl Al-Kitāb*. As such not much has been fleshed out in Jewish and Christian development after the era of Muhammad or their treatment under Muslim rule.

Despite criticism of the classical exegeses and its methodology, Al-Ṭabarī with his traditional approach demonstrates the discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* through the various views of other exegetes, relying on the occasions of revelation and historical context he referred to. Then, after referring to interpretations and commentaries of other exegetes, he chose his own preferred interpretations. His commentary on the passages related to *Ahl Al-Kitāb* showed the fluctuating discourse between negative

and positive and clarifies the reasons for criticism and the reason for praise. However, in his commentary he repeated the same occasions of revelations for different passages related to Jews and Christians. This opens the door to the inaccuracy and uncertainty of the occasions of revelations that he alludes to in his interpretation. There are issues with the occasions of revelation which are only available for a few groups of passages. When they exist, it frequently happens that numerous contradictory occasions of revelations are narrated. In other examples, an identical narrative is cited as an occasion of revelation for different verses. But this was not a problem for classical exegetes who went through the Qur'an, verse by verse, and gathered the relevant material connected to each verse, rarely establishing a larger context.

The study has demonstrated that the classical exegeses have not focused much on matters of polemics or dialogue; nor have they focused on what is common between these groups of faith. Moreover, the tone and the language of the classical exegeses towards the Jews and Christians was stronger and harsher than the tone and the language of contemporary ones. This is, perhaps, due to the differences in time, place, and environment. It may also be due to the absence of religiously-motivated war affecting the lives of the contemporary exegetes. An increase of violence and war in modern times makes it evident that motivations are multifaceted, involving race, political gain, economic interests, and/or sectarian differences.

Consequently, the contemporary exegetes such as Ibn 'Āshūr and Sha'rāwī tried to fill in this gap, but they did not succeed to address and discuss these issues in a systematic way and clear explanation. The understanding of the contemporary exegetes to the Qur'anic Jews and Christians remain largely theological and conceptual such as trinity, divinity of Jesus, distortion of the scriptures and so on. They contextualise the passages on *Ahl Al-Kitāb* and categorise the Qur'anic discourse, specially the polemical one, into Makkan and Madinan Qur'an. They maintain that the Makkan passages thoroughly address the Pagans, polytheists, and disbelievers who lived in Makkah; while the polemical discourse in the Madinan Qur'an thoroughly addresses the People of the Book. The tone of the polemical passages mentioning the Jews is harsher than that of those addressing the Christians, and there is more emphasis placed on the deeds and behaviours of the Jews. The polemics dealing with Christians focuses more on issues of belief, such as salvation, the crucifixion (Q 4: 157), the trinity (Q 5: 73), and the alleged divinity of Jesus (Q 4: 171); while the

polemics dealing with Jews focuses Muhammad's prophecy and their disobedience to Moses and Torah. The polemical passages reflect the reasons for the varying Qur'anic discourse concerning *Ahl Al-Kitāb* – they are a people with sincere individuals, as well as defiantly arrogant individuals; each category is to be dealt with appropriately. Therefore, it has been noted that the Qur'anic discourse does not dismiss *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in its totality nor discourages Muslims from befriending those who are compassionate and sincere among them. Rather, the discourse adopts a treatment and an attitude that can be described as neutral and balanced, recognising the good attributes of those who are true to God and condemning those who are not. Thus, there is no contradiction between the texts which praise them and the texts which criticise them, as these passages are respectively addressing two different categories, based on their beliefs, intentions, and deeds.

The thesis also observes that the contemporary exegeses of *Al-Tahrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* and Sha'rāwī's *Khawāṭir* discuss the Qur'anic discourse on People of the Book with greater detail, covering more current issues. They employ different methodologies and styles which are different from classical exegeses. They emphasise the concurrent and contemporary circumstances between Muslims and People of the Book, demonstrating the rationality of Islam and avoiding Judaeo-Christian sources and superstitious practices and beliefs. Moreover, less emphasis is placed on the environmental and historical context of the Muslims at the time of revelation. Naturally, there are similarities in their individual contributions. Despite the slight differences in the time, environment, and political circumstances surrounding the exegetes, their methodologies and orientations were similar, especially in their intents and purposes. It is unlikely that Qur'anic exegetes are able to escape the influence of their times that inadvertently shaped their personalities and talents. It is evident from each of their works that their commentary of the Qur'an was not independent of their own social influence, whether deliberately or otherwise. Notably, it is from the miraculous nature of the Qur'an that each exegete approaches the Qur'an differently but is able to draw from its guidance.

It has also been noted that the contemporary exegetes incline to consider that the relationship with the People of the Book in the Qur'anic discourse is based on peace, respect and harmony, rather than conflict and clash, because according to them the source and aim of the religions are the same; and the Torah and the Gospel are sent

from One God. They for example maintain that the Qur'an affirms that God gave Moses the Torah, meaning that it is authentic. It was the Laws given to Moses and the Israelite prophets after him, as well as the Rabbis who judged by them. The contextualisation of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* passages in the contemporary exegeses reveal that the main spirit of all religions is monotheism and submission to the One God, as well as His prophet's guidance. Therefore, every prophet asked his people to submit to God; and anyone who believed in God and His prophet was considered to be a Muslim. The Jew who sincerely believes in God, Moses, and the Torah, the Last Day, and does good deeds and abandons distortion in his religion, is a Muslim in the literal meaning and will be rewarded. Similarly, the Christian who sincerely believes in God, Jesus, and the Gospel, the Last Day and abandons distortion in his religion, is a Muslim and will be rewarded.

The study also discussed Ibn 'Āshūr's approach to interpreting the passages relating to the People of the Book which relied on traditions and linguistic rules and adhered to the mainstream classical exegeses. Ibn 'Āshūr presented a fluctuating portrayal of the Qur'anic discourse on *Ahl Al-Kitāb*. At times, he places a group of them at the same level as the Pagans who worshipped idols or claimed that God has a son who should be worshipped. At other times, he placed those who practise their religion and follow the guidance of the Torah and the Gospel (as they were revealed) at the level of the successful Muslims. This is due to his relying on the context and the historical events of the text. He also mentions that they would be losers on the Day of Judgement if they had received the message of Muhammad and had then rejected him. Unlike Riḍā, Ibn 'Āshūr holds that Islam remained intact and that it is an extension of the religion of Abraham, while the original Judaism and Christianity were specific to a historical time and people. He also views that although Islam is a confirmation of previous messages, it overrides the legal rulings from the previous scriptures.

Sha'rāwī has also introduced a modern explanation and employed common language and a logic-based style to the subject of *Ahl Al-Kitāb*. He agrees with Ibn 'Āshūr's views on his explanations of some passages of the Qur'an and differs with him on others. He maintains that the positive discourse about the People of the Book refers to those who converted to Islam at the time of Muhammad (Q 3: 113). He believed that the passage found in (Q 3:199) referred to those who believed that the new message was also true. Sha'rāwī held that the two major *Sūrahs*, *Al-Baqarah* and *Āl 'Imran*, show

that the message of Islam came to confirm Judaism and Christianity and not to cancel them or their teachings. It was not sent to change history as peoples of other faith did; but it came to preserve the correct events of history. Therefore, *Sūrah Āl ‘Imran*, which relates the story of Jesus and his people, comes after *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, which mentions the story of Moses and the children of Israel. However, in his commentary on (Q 4: 170), Sha‘rāwī suggested a different explanation, which is that Islam came to cancel previous messages and complete the chains of messengers and prophets. He also viewed that the best nation, singled out by God, has to fulfil three conditions to realise its title: belief in God, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. Sha‘rāwī like other contemporary exegetes [‘Abdu, Riḍā, and Ibn ‘Āshūr] view that that being favoured by God was not because of social status or affiliation, but that it lied in belief and action. If a people are not deserving of the title, then they cannot hold it.

It has been noted that the contemporary exegetes have recontextualised the texts relating to the Jews and Christians and presented fresh interpretations to the polemical passages addressing them, where the differences between Jews, Christians, and Muslims are most highlighted. They agree on the culpability of the People of the Book on some of these polemical issues such as the distortion of the Torah and Gospel, the claim of the divinity of Jesus, trinity, and the Jews’ transgressions and their disobedience to Moses and the Law of God. They presented an in-depth explanation of the meaning of Islam, the polemics of the People of the Book with Muhammad, and the connection between this meaning and the People of the Book. The contemporary exegetes emphasised that a Muslim should not read the passage as a remark on the history of nations, nor with a sectarian view for the sake of polemics and argumentation. Instead, they felt that it should be read as a revelation for guidance and admonition to those who believe so that they may avoid divisions and differences like the previous nations.

Although the contemporary exegetes have introduced fresh insights and interpretation to the polemical texts, however, there are other different opinions and unclear stances amongst them over other polemical issues. For instance, there is no agreement over the issue of salvation; one opinion assigns salvific exclusivity only to Muslims, and another that encompasses Jews and Christians within the scope of salvation. Whereas the popular notion is that the former abrogated the latter, the contemporary exegetes consider the two sets to refer to two different types of Jews and Christians, with those

verses painting the two groups as those who submitted to the will of God (literally *Islam*).

The contemporary exegetes discuss the meaning of Islam in the Qur'anic usage and maintains that it is a universal faith as brought forth by all Prophets, but they differ as to whether that is still applicable after the advent of Muhammad. Some view that *Islam* as a term carrying a more consolidated meaning post-Muhammad, whereas others view that Islam to carry a more inclusive meaning, which they conceptualise as the 'unity of religion', i.e. one religion was revealed to all humanity regardless of their divergent backgrounds. The latter affords a more sympathetic view of non-Muslims. The words *Islam* and *Muslims* in the Qur'an do not refer to the religion as it is known today, but rather in their literal sense, i.e. to submit to the will of God. As per this understanding, there is no reason to suggest that the verses with a more lenient view of Jews and Christians were cancelled out by those with a harsher verdict on them. It can be argued that this Qur'anic *Islam*, as opposed to the religion Islam, should be put centre stage to foster a more inclusive attitude of people of non-Muslim faiths.

The other polemical issue which has been discussed by the classical and contemporary exegetes is the issue of distortion to the Torah and Gospel. The discussion demonstrated that they agree that the distortion occurred to these scriptures; but they differ whether it occurred to the text or to the meaning. The classical exegetes such as Al-Ṭabarī maintains that distortion was not in the text but rather in interpretation and meaning. The contemporary exegetes have also discussed other polemical issues such as trinity, divinity of Jesus, and sonship of Jesus and have faced difficulty in amalgamating the monotheism supported by the Qur'an, and Trinitarian monotheism. Some explanations are more reconciliatory than others.

The study also concludes that the methodology of contemporary exegeses has given rise to new ideas and fresh interpretations of the passages related to the People of the Book. That is the key to unlocking the answers to the questions posed in this thesis. There is scarcity in academic contributions using classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegetical analysis in the English language, even more regarding the portrayal of the People of the Book. Therefore, this study aims to add to this small academic niche and help guide future academics and readers in their research on this subject and build on it to find more answers to the polemical issues. It is notable that the

contemporary exegeses have not given a complete interpretation nor explicit explanation to some polemical texts. There are still many questions and unclear issues that have not been clarified by the contemporary exegetes. Moreover, the Qur'an still remains full of hidden and deep meanings and interpretations which need to be discovered by exegetes who can generate new understanding to these texts and make it compatible with modern times.

The originality of this thesis lies in its deep investigation and analysis of the exegeses surrounding the Qur'anic texts pertaining to *Ahl Al-Kitāb* using these three selected exegeses. Other works on the subject have not studied the subject as deeply as this, nor have they focused on the exegetical aspect of it using the aforementioned exegeses, nor have they discussed the historical contexts and occasions of revelation like this. The other studies have covered this subject either from a historical perspective, limited to a specific era, or from individual perspectives that are found in other exegeses. This subject has been studied, but only a few passages from the Qur'an were discussed and they were not analysed from different perspective in this much detail. This thesis is also original, as no previous study has analysed the views of Sha'rāwī or Ibn 'Āshūr on the subject. Most studies about other exegetes were in Arabic.

This thesis builds upon the previous studies about the People of the Book in the Qur'an. This subject is in need of further critical study and research in order to better understand the Qur'anic portrayal of People of the Book; passages relating to them, and the relationship between Islam and other religions, especially in modern times during which major crises have arisen due to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Contemporary understandings of passages related to other faiths in general, and Jews and Christians in particular, may help ease the passage of the globalisation and modernity that forces isolated communities to peacefully coexist.

Although there have not been many exegetical studies on the Jews and Christians in the Qur'an, there are contemporary Muslim scholars who have studied and graduated in the West and are able to contribute to the subject of *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Qur'an, narrowing the gap of differences and building bridges of understanding between the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. There are also non-Muslim scholars who are working to achieve human prosperity through the understanding and appreciation of sacred

texts. However, contributions still need to be made and areas of research still need to be investigated regarding the polemical passages about *Ahl Al-Kitāb* in the Qur'an. New exegetical studies should also focus on the similarities between the Abrahamic faiths rather than focussing entirely on the differences. There should be a goal of achieving mutual dialogue and respect. These studies should be extended to include people of other faiths as well, so that the world is able to enjoy understanding, tolerance, peace and stability.

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